

BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

Copyrighted, 1895, by BEADLE AND ADAMS.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

July 31, 1895.

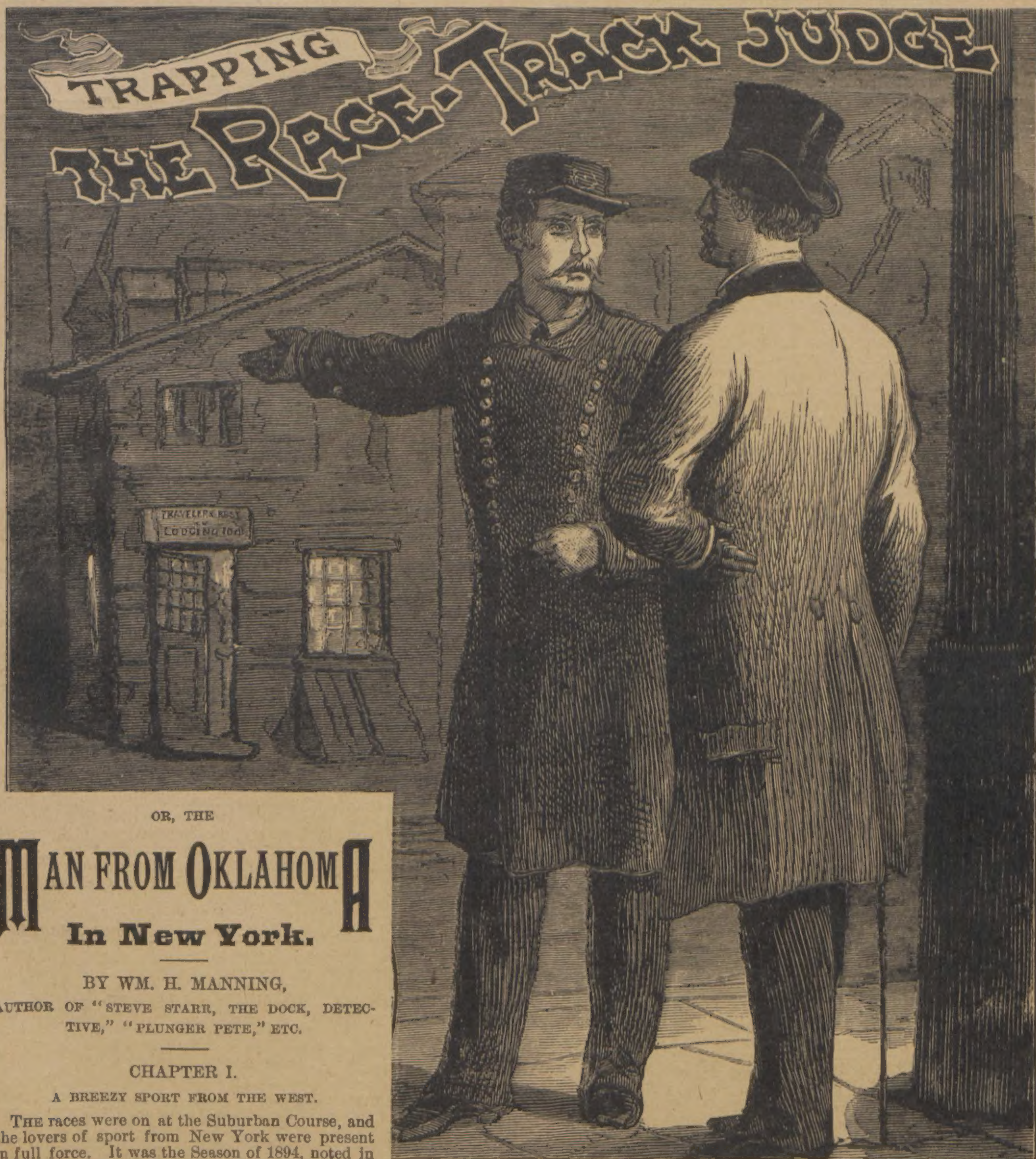
No. 875.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXVIII.



OR, THE

MAN FROM OKLAHOMA In New York.

BY WM. H. MANNING,

AUTHOR OF "STEVE STARR, THE DOCK, DETEC-
TIVE," "PLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BREEZY SPORT FROM THE WEST.

THE races were on at the Suburban Course, and the lovers of sport from New York were present in full force. It was the Season of 1894, noted in the annals of the turf as a period of success in all things pertaining to the business, and a large

"THEY'VE HAD A TRAGEDY OVER THERE, TO-NIGHT," THE ROUNDSMAN
EXPLAINED, STRETCHING OUT HIS ARM.

crowd showed in the grand stand and betting ring and around the paddock and lawn.

The fifth event was nearing the call, and men were elbowing each other in the ring with the wild enthusiasm of devotees of the sport.

"Brazos is the favorite at two to one," remarked a red-faced man, scanning the bookmakers' boards, "and he will just about pull off the purse, too."

"I've got up quite a sum on Pontiac," remarked a wasp-waisted clerk.

He was really a "piker" of the most pronounced sort, and his risk was just two dollars, but in the betting ring all men are equal.

"Hedge," answered the red-faced man. "Pontiac will lose."

"But he did his last race in fine shape."

"Seven furlongs," was the contemptuous reply. "That's all he is good for now. The horse don't go long races any more, but confines himself to sprints. Do you know why? Pontiac has seen his day, and some fine afternoon he will just go to pieces. His lungs, or heart, are bad. Pontiac is a ten-to-one shot in this event, and I tell you he can't do a thing. Hedge! You'll lose all if you don't. You'll see Pontiac quit in rank shape."

"How much money have you got that says that?" broke in another voice, sharply and angrily, and a new-comer pushed forward close to the man who had the poor opinion of Pontiac. Now, that disparager had been sincere, but he was not sure when the expected break on the noted racehorse's part would come, so, recognizing a call-down in dead earnest, he was slow to answer.

He saw before him a man of about thirty years, and one very different from the average frequenter of the race-course.

"Wild West," thought the man with the red face.

It seemed that his opinion was correct. The dress of the stranger, the bronzed hue of his cheeks, and his general air, betrayed the story. No elegant, delicate citizen of the metropolis was he, but a rough-and-ready, stalwart product of the land beyond the Mississippi.

"How much?" repeated this tall Westerner.

"My bets are all up," responded the red-faced man.

"Oh, but you've got money that Pontiac will lose, of course, when you fight him so heavy with your tongue? How much? I'll go you a hundred or a thousand."

"I am all up. The bookies have my bets."

"But just a private wager, you know," persisted the stranger. "I want some fun out of this, and I take Pontiac for my horse. Lew Austin rides him, and there's a lad that knows his biz. Understand me, I'll bet you, and put up cash, though I'm good for anything I don't plank down, for that matter. My name is John Williamson, late of Metropolis, Oklahoma. How much did you say you would bet that Pontiac would lose?"

"I decline to bet."

"Ha! so the decision goes that way, does it?" cried Williamson, sarcastically. "You are wind-sure, but not money-sure. Who is there around here that wants to bet that Pontiac will lose? I can accommodate them right now. Haul out your wallets, gents, and let us do business quick. The bugle will blow soon, and then it will be too late. I give you a mighty good thing—the field against Pontiac. Who will go me?"

John Williamson made a good figure as he stood there, cool, ready and stalwart, but he found no takers of his bet. The reason was that there was a well-defined idea among the talent that Pontiac was bound to go to pieces some day like a house of cards. Some day they would see him struggling among the ruck, with wind and heart broken, but until he met with his collapse it was not safe to bet too much against him, and the big pile of money flashed so ostentatiously by the man from Oklahoma frightened them.

Nobody bet, and the crowd hastened to surge out to back up the rail-birds.

The racers came out—the horses long, lithe and bony, and the riders resplendent in their varied suits. Williamson had found a place by the rail, and looked at a slight young man on a black horse.

"Whoop her up, Lew!" he shouted.

The jockey glanced briefly toward the speaker, smiled slightly, and then gave all his attention to his horse.

"There's the winner, sure enough," declared the Western man. "I go my pile on Lew Austin and his nag! Who takes me?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled a man from the rear. "You talk too much."

Williamson turned, his face beaming with good humor.

"Stranger," he replied, quickly, "maybe I do; but who wouldn't wake up when a horse-race was on? Who could help it?"

His manner and his words appealed to all, and faces relaxed in appreciation of the true-sport point.

"That's right," agreed one man, and others joined in approval.

The horses were by the starter. One of their number was sullen; another wanted to kick holes through everything in reach; all of which delayed the start. But presently an even break was followed by the dropping of the starter's flag.

"They're off!" was the general shout.

They were off. Seven long, lean horses shot along like so many arrows, and the whole party raced off toward the first furlong post.

"Rushaway leads!"

A gray animal was at the front, and going as if he meant to stay there. He did stay until three furlongs had been covered, and then the rail-birds and grand stand sitters raised a new cry.

"Brazos passes him!"

The favorite was at the front, and he set a terrific pace for his field. Others were trying to take his measure, but it looked as if it would be a case of one against the ruck.

"All over!" exclaimed a devout believer in Brazos.

"Don't ye believe it!" shouted John Williamson. "Keep your eye on Lew Austin. Ha! do ye see? The boy rides now! Gad! how he sits his nag! Ah! ah! ah! There's a seat for you! Ha! Pontiac gets his gait. Now see what happens in the stretch!"

The competitors were struggling toward the last turn. The favorite still kept his place, but it was seen that Pontiac was crawling up on him. There might be danger of the brown gelding going stale, but he did not show it then. His pace was tremendous, and a murmur rose, thunder-like, from the multitude.

"Pontiac gains! He gains!"

They turned into the stretch. Brazos went a trifle wide, and the chance was not lost by vigilant Lew Austin. With consummate skill he took advantage of an opening, and when they were fairly headed the racers ran neck and neck.

"A hundred to fifty on Pontiac!" yelled John Williamson, but nobody heard him then.

On came the two leaders; the excitement intense. In a crisis like that seconds seem minutes, and though so short a distance was to be traveled the bettors had time to do a good deal of thinking. So did the jockeys, and their struggle was grand.

Neck and neck they kept their place, and nobody could pick the winner yet. Nearer and nearer to the wire, and it became a bruising finish.

"A dead heat!" ventured a veteran.

But, no! When only a few bounds remained to the horses the rider of Pontiac, in racing parlance, "fairly lifted" his mount, and the noble brown gelding was sent under the wire with a clear lead!

"Pontiac wins!" thundered the people, with a roar like the sea in fury.

It was all over, and John Williamson stood shouting like a madman.

"Good boy, Lew! Good boy! You rode like a cowboy, and that's all anybody could say. Who prophesied that Pontiac would lose? Gone stale, has he? Well, the man who thinks that wants to call on me when the nag goes to the post again. I can accommodate him with a cool thou-

sand. I say Pontiac is as sound as a dollar, and I know horses."

It was a defiant bugle blast, but few heard it. Others had their exultation to voice, or their woes to nurse, and though the man from Oklahoma had a booming voice he found few listeners then.

The roar of many voices quieted down, when there arose a loud and angry voice.

"The win was not fair!" shouted a man in immaculate city dress.

"How's that?" asked a tout.

"Austin fouled Brazos at the turn!"

"Fouled him?"

"Just what he did. Austin stole the race!"

John Williamson pushed roughly forward.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Clear case of foul."

"Foul! Are you drunk?"

"That's correct, and I am going to the judges."

"Wait."

Williamson blocked the complainant's way, angry and vicious.

"Say, old man," he rumbled, trying to keep under control, "don't let ye'r voice get away with you."

"Austin stole the race, I say!"

"You are a liar!" thundered the man from Oklahoma.

"I have nothing to say to you, cur!" was the hot retort.

"What's that?" cried Williamson.

"I think my English was plain. Whether it was or not, make anything of it you please!"

With this the speaker tried to pass on, but the attempt was not a success. Williamson, hot blooded, barred the way.

"Say, you called me a cur," he exclaimed. "This must be answered for, by Jove! Put up your hands."

"I am not a brawler," was the answer, "and I have nothing to do with you. Get out of my way."

He made no effort to go around the man from Oklahoma. He was a big man himself, and full of pluck. He did not intend to give this Western person an inch of room or consideration.

"I'm no brawler myself," retorted John, "but you called me a cur. This is what I'll do."

He reached out with the full intention of pulling the nose of his adversary, but was unceremoniously jostled by the crowd, and succeeded only in brushing his cheek. That was enough to enrage the New Yorker. His hand went to his pocket, found a revolver, and essayed to draw it, but he had to deal with one far his superior in that line. In a twinkling he was covered by a weapon of the same sort.

"Halt!" ordered the Western man, sharply. "Don't pull, or something will happen. Save your life, stranger!"

It was a fair warning from a man who knew his own abilities, but when he had spoken he stood ready to drop the quarrel or fight.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOCKEY'S WARNING.

Drawn revolvers were not on the programme at the race-track, and the few persons who had been attracted by the trouble saw the need of interference. Quickly they stepped between the two men.

"Stop it, stop it!" urged one. "Don't disgrace this track by any such break."

"But he called me a cur!" cried John Williamson.

"You called him a liar."

A quick change went over John's face.

"Thunder! Did I do that? Did I do it before he flung his speech at me?" he demanded to know.

"Yes; just what you did."

"Then, by Jove! I should be ashamed of myself. Liar isn't the word a decent man should use, unless he's hard pressed. So I said it. Well, I'm sorry, but he just tore me all up by saying that Lew stole that race. Foul! There wasn't none, by thunder! Of course this gent will say the same when he has cooled off a bit. Stranger, I'm no tough, and I'm willing to do the right thing. Let's call it quits. Here's my hand—"

John Williamson could be all sunshine when he felt like it, and there was now a breezy frankness about him that should have made peace all around. He put out his hand with a friendly manner, and a smile crossed his face.

But he made no gain. The New Yorker had been looking at him with cool hostility. He now disregarded the hand.

"I have nothing to say to you," he coldly returned. "I shall make complaint to the judges of the foul at the turn."

With this he thrust the revolver back into his pocket and pushed his way through the crowd.

This disregard of his peace overtures nettled Williamson. He looked after the stranger with eyes glittering ominously, but when he took a forward step, as if to pursue him, he was blocked by the crowd, not unkindly.

"Come, come," urged the former peace-maker, "don't do it. That is Verplanck Jones, a rich New Yorker—"

"I don't care if it is the mayor of New York. He can't walk over me, I am telling you. Let me go—"

"But he is rich and influential, and his money and influence would beat you out if there was trouble."

"Oh, thunder! I don't care a rap for his money or influence. I can fight them both and win. Still, what's the use? I'll drop it all—I ain't any brawler!"

He put away his revolver.

"Gents," he added, in his peculiar, sunny way. "I beg pardon of all of you. This isn't Oklahoma, where I hold forth and I understand you don't go much or shooting. Neither do I—bad habit, and I won't do anything of the sort. Let Mr. Verplanck Jones go; I reckon I never shall see him any more."

"That's the best way to look at it."

"Sure! Say, though, he's going to the judges to press that claim of foul. But why need I care? The claim won't go, and that's flat."

All of his anger seemed gone, and those who had looked for a fight gave up hope. John Williamson was not destitute of temper, and hailed from a section where men fought when they felt like it, but he was not wantonly inclined to get into trouble, and his comment, muttered to himself as he walked off, was characteristic of the man.

"We were both a little hot under the collar, and men will be sassy at times; but we evened up on words, and we can afford to call it quits unless he presses that charge of foul. That is rot."

The Oklahomite, wanting to see Lew Austin, made his way to a point near the paddock and waited until the jockey came out. Austin looked very much pleased over his hard-won victory, and his face lighted up at sight of Williamson.

"Well, I got there!" he exclaimed.

"Thunder and stars! so you did!" agreed John. "Got there with both feet and shoes a-flapping. Lew, my lad, you're a brick! You rode like a genuine cowboy, and I reckon I'll take you back to Oklahoma with me when I go. Oh! but that was a great finish!"

"Brazos pressed me hard."

"You pressed him harder."

"A very satisfactory victory, I admit."

"Clean-cut as a whistle. Pontiac is a corker!"

"He faltered, John; he faltered."

"I didn't see it."

"Nor I; but I felt it."

"Well, he got there."

"John, I imagine it is about his last race. You know he is entered for the Maple Leaf Stakes later on. Well, I am going to let him rest until then, and try to have him fit as a fiddle. Pontiac's racing days are about over."

"Nonsense! I tell you the horse is good for a hundred races yet."

"And I say his work is about over."

"Lew, you have listened to the chatter of the turf sports until you have got inoculated yourself. Let up on it. I tell you that old Pontiac is in no danger of breaking down."

"Wait and see. I say there is such danger, and he will go all to pieces soon."

"Say, boy," exclaimed Williamson, irritably, "you must feel that he ain't worth much if you think that. How much is he worth?"

"Not over five hundred dollars."

"I'll give you that sum for him," and John whipped out a big roll of money and exhibited it plainly.

"Five hundred for Pontiac. Is it a go?" he asked.

"I don't want to cheat you."

"You say the horse would bring five thousand in perfect trim; you told me that yesterday."

"Yes; just what I said."

"Then you won't cheat me. Will you take it?"

Williamson caught the jockey by a button and brought him to a halt. The two men were standing alone at the time. They had passed out of the race grounds and were well to one side of the departing crowd. Lew looked thoughtfully at the money.

"You know as much about horses as I do," he muttered.

"More, boy, more."

"And you are willing to risk it after my warning?"

"Yes, perfectly willing."

"I'll do it on one condition."

"What is that?"

"I have Pontiac entered for the Maple Leaf Stakes, and all my bets and arrangements are made. Allow me to have absolute control on that day, and to make or break, as I should do if there was no sale, and the gelding is yours."

"Here's your cash."

Williamson again extended the roll of money.

"Wait until to-morrow—"

"If the bargain is fully done I want to pay now."

"Just as you say," and the jockey took the money.

"Pontiac is yours," he added.

"He will win many a race yet, and I think I shall want you to ride him. Why, of course I shall. Is it a go?"

"If you wish."

"I do."

"Then I will ride him. He is the only good high-rate horse I ever owned. I began as a jockey, worked along slowly and saved my money until I had just five hundred dollars. I was riding for the man who owned Pontiac when the horse went lame. All efforts to cure him failed. I had a theory as to the cause of the lameness and explained it to the owner. He would not be convinced, and, believing the lameness incurable, and he would take five hundred dollars for the animal at a venture. I bought him, cured the lameness, and have won ten thousand dollars with him; but, as I have said, Pontiac's days are about over, so I am willing to part with him for what I gave."

"The gelding is going to win a bushel of money yet," declared John.

"For your sake, I hope so."

"He will."

Lew shook his head, and the subject was dropped.

"Where are you going now?" asked Williamson, presently.

"Home. Say, John, shall you be busy this evening?"

"Not in particular."

"Then I would like to see you."

"I shall be delighted. Come around to Judge Manchester's, and we will have a jolly time—"

"No; not there. Do you remember the old shanty down toward the water back of Manchester's?"

"Yes."

"Let us meet there, at nine o'clock."

"All right, if you say so. But why not at Manchester's?"

"John," replied the jockey, with unusual seriousness in his tone, "how much do you know about Chase Manchester?"

"I know he is to be my future father-in-law."

"I understand that. I know that you met Mabel Manchester when she was traveling in the West, and became engaged to her, and that you are now on here East to see her, and stopping with the family."

Still, what do you know of Chase Manchester?"

"Why, he's one of the judges of the races—"

"Everybody knows that, and I am aware he's father to your betrothed. What more do you know of him?"

"I'm not sure I follow you," answered John, questioningly.

"You know no more of him, then?"

"Nothing important."

"Do you think he's your friend?"

"Why, I'm engaged to his daughter!" and Williamson seemed surprised.

"That may settle it, but I referred to something else, and I was not sure he was your friend. Now, let me say, John, beware of the judge!"

"Thunder and stars! What do you mean? If there is anything crooked, out with it."

"No time to tell you now. But that is why I wish to see you this evening. Come to the place mentioned, and I'll tell you the whole business. I am a little uncertain as to my grip, but I feel you should know the truth, and as quickly as possible. Don't fail to come."

"I'll be there, sure pop, and anxious to hear the story. Do you mean that the judge is going to interfere with my courtship of Mabel?"

"It does not deal with that matter at all; it is something far more important. But I have stayed too long. I must be off; you shall hear it all at nine o'clock. Don't forget!"

The jockey had intimated by his manner as much as by his words that he was in a hurry, and he now hastened away. Williamson looked after him with a peculiar expression.

"Thinks my courtship isn't the most important thing out, eh? Ha! that is what I call cool; but I know he meant no harm. I wonder what he has got in his brain anyhow? What is all this talk about Judge Manchester not being my friend? Pshaw! I am engaged to Mabel, and the old gentleman has not given any sign of disapproval. I reckon if he had a grudge against me I should know of it—he isn't the man to be timid of speaking his mind. Lew was away off, and yet, he isn't the man to go off at a tangent. I am rather curious to learn what he has to say. I never have fallen in love with old Chase Manchester nor his son Otis, if I do adore their fair Mabel. Well I'm off to the house."

And Williamson walked away rapidly.

One of the finest houses of the vicinity was that owned by Chase Manchester, the judge of racing. Some years before he had built it on his property, and so fitted it up that it was little less than a mansion. Large, modern, and surrounded with spacious grounds, it was the typical residence of a country gentleman of wealth.

This was the place where John Williamson was a guest, and where he had renewed the acquaintance of his betrothed, which had been begun in the West.

On this occasion he met Mabel on the piazza, and they went to one side and sat down to talk. He never missed a chance to talk with her, and thought himself a lucky fellow to enjoy her affections.

She was a tall and stately young woman—so stately that many regarded her as cold and distant, but the man from Oklahoma had never noticed it. Perhaps he was not over-demonstrative himself, and thus missed seeing that she lacked something.

Mabel was not a devout admirer of the races, and she heard so much of the matter, with a lover who admired sincerely and a father who judged the races, and a brother who was a bookmaker, that she had often requested to be free from remarks on the subject.

Williamson was sympathetic, and did not refer to the races on this occasion, and their talk was all of other things. Half an hour passed; then a servant came to remind them that they already were late for supper, and they hastened in at once.

Mabel's father and brother were at the table.

The judge was out on the same tall

stately pattern as his daughter, but the son, Otis, was a smaller man, and less attractive to the eye. The father was so impressive of appearance that the opinion generally existed that he had been a jurist before his days as judge of racing, but this was an error.

Otis did not look up, but the judge was genial in his stately manner.

"A good day's sport," he remarked to John.

"Right you are!" the Western man responded. "Some corking races and bruising finishes."

"No walkover for anybody."

"Not one, by Jove!"

"The results leave one sore heart among the crowd."

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

Judge Manchester glanced at his son as he spoke, and Otis looked up from a sullen study of his plate with a scowl.

"That means me," he replied. "You are right; I am sore."

"Did you get on the wrong side?" inquired Williamson, smiling.

"He dropped something heavy on Pontiac," added the judge.

"I suppose the bookies were hit hard."

"Otis would have been all right if he had followed the other pencils, but he was sure Pontiac would lose, so he gave better odds than his fellow bookmakers. Result, he carried too much to be safe, and when the gelding came under the wire it was a hard hit for Otis."

"Lew Austin fouled the favorite," curtly added Otis.

"Not much!" retorted John.

"Everybody says so."

"Then everybody is wrong."

"Anyhow, the race has been protested."

"How do you decide, judge?" asked John, quickly.

"We have taken time for that," replied Manchester. "All bets have been paid. We shall drop it or suspend Austin for fouling."

"He rode fair," warmly exclaimed Williamson.

"I don't believe it," just as warmly asserted Otis.

"Come, you two," reprovingly spoke the older man; "don't get into an argument. We know, John, that Lew Austin is your friend, and you have an interest in his mounts, but Otis sees the matter another way in this case. Let it all rest for now."

"That's the best way," admitted Williamson, in his hearty manner. "Our interests are different in this case, Ote, and it isn't natural that we should look at it the same way. Less talk the better. The attendance was great, judge."

"Fine!"

They drifted into general discussion, and there was no further clashing of opinion.

After supper everybody but John seemed to have something to do. Mabel was an industrious young woman, and she went to her household duties, while Williamson saw the male Manchesters, father and son, move off on their stated business.

John went to his own room, lighted a cigar and sat down by the window. He liked that point of view. Less than a quarter of a mile away the ocean rolled in its restless manner, and it was new to him. He had seen mighty prairies, but never the ocean until he came East on this occasion.

His was not a poetic nature, but he bowed mentally to the power that could make and control such a vast body of heaving water, and it pleased him much. He liked to sit there, when night had fallen, and see the various craft move across the watery space, with their lights twinkling so brightly.

On this occasion it was already dark when he sat down, and he had the old panorama to amuse him. He smoked, meditated and enjoyed himself. No light was in his room, but he could make out the time by means of an electric light on the lawn, so he waited the hour when he was to meet Lewis Austin.

His cigar was burning to an end, when he suddenly dropped his peaceful and thoughtful air, and, starting, directed his gaze more earnestly toward the water.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

It had been a human cry that had sounded from down near the shore, floating to him with sufficient plainness to make him instantly apprehensive and excited. No common cry that—his long experience with life in the West told him that.

"Somebody in a bad way!" he added, uneasily.

It had been a cry of distress, he thought, and he rose to his feet.

"Somebody may be drowning. That was a sort of shriek. But all the men around here can swim like fishes, I've been told, and, for that, it didn't sound like the cry of a drowning man."

He put his head far out of the window and listened keenly. The impulse was upon him to hasten to the shore and see if he could be of use, but he was so far away that he realized that he would hardly be in time to give aid to anybody who might need it.

"I may have mistaken the note of it," he pursued, mentally. "It is nothing strange for cries to sound along the shore—but this one sounded different, like a cry of great distress."

He could not satisfy himself, or get at ease, but the fact that he could not be in time to aid in any ordinary emergency influenced him, and he finally settled down.

He continued to watch and listen, but the darkness prevented him from seeing anything, and no more cries drifted to his hearing.

"I reckon it was nothing much," he muttered.

Presently he caught sight of two figures advancing from the beach. They came with a deliberation which reassured him still further, and he lighted another cigar to celebrate his delivery from anxiety. The men gave signs of passing close by the mansion, and the electric lights brought them into closer view.

"I know one of them. It's a fellow who poses as a tout, and I believe his name is Tommy Deegan. He has a hang-dog air, but he may be as honest as old Pontiac is in his races."

The two men went past and he saw them no more.

"Very likely one of them yelled just for fun, though I must say it was a bad yell. It makes me shiver now to think of it; just as if somebody was in vital distress—bah! let it drop. What is it to me?"

Williamson looked at his watch. He had just time to keep the appointment with Lew Austin, and he left the house. He saw only the servants on the way. The front door was open, but nobody was there, and nobody on the front side of the piazza.

This barely interested him; he kept on and walked to the place of meeting. The jockey was not there.

John paced to and fro and waited. He knew Lew Austin's way, and had no doubt of his keeping the engagement.

Five minutes passed—ten, twenty, half an hour. John had grown impatient. He looked in vain; there was no sign of his friend.

"He will come pretty soon."

But Lew did not come, and when an hour had elapsed John gave him up. Possibly he might be found at his quarters, he thought.

Lew boarded at a hotel, so called. It was not a pretentious place, and was much frequented by horsemen and racegoers, but it had a good reputation, as far as Williamson knew. He went there and asked for his friend.

"He hasn't been around here for several hours," replied the clerk. "He went out soon after supper."

"Are you sure he ain't in his room?"

"Maybe he is. You can go and see."

Williamson went up, but there was nobody in the room, so he returned to the office and sat down to await the jockey's arrival. By that time it was getting late, and, though the devotees of race-track life

had been sitting in judgment on the racing of the day, they soon began to fall off, and nobody remained but John and the clerk.

The former had sat down with the fixed intention of remaining until Lew came, but his purpose was frustrated. At twelve o'clock the clerk prepared to close.

The man from Oklahoma was persevering, and when the office was thus made out of the question he went to the front piazza and sat down to continue the watch. When it was nearly one he saw a form coming through the darkness.

"That may be he," murmured John.

The pedestrian came closer and he recognized, not Lew, but another jockey of the name of Isaac Winters. Leaving the piazza John accosted this man.

"Say, young fellow, have you seen Lew Austin?"

"Not since a little after supper. Wasn't he over your way?"

"Over my way?"

"He said he was going to see Judge Manchester."

"The dickens he was!"

"You see, it was about the claim of foul. When Verplanck Jones put in the claim at the end of the race nobody thought it would amount to anything, but there was so much said about it, later, that Lew decided to call on the judge. There wasn't any foul, and he wanted to get in his own argument on the subject."

"Humph! Yes, yes!"

Williamson spoke slowly and without the degree of satisfaction shown by one who feels that a point is settled. If Lewis had come to the Manchester mansion before John himself went out, it seemed that he would have seen his friend, while, if the meeting with the judge had been later, it would still give him time to keep the appointment. Even if Manchester was not found at all, there did not seem to be any good reason why Lew should fail to see the Western man.

There was nothing to do but to go home, so John went without further delay.

"Mighty queer what has become of Lew," he thought.

The rest of the night he slept peacefully. He was a trifle late in waking the next morning, and the family were at the table when he went down to breakfast.

He was greeted cordially by the judge, to whom he proceeded to make apology for his lateness.

"That's all right," was the response. "Our ocean air is doing you good. It is very conducive to sound sleep."

John made suitable reply, and it was considerably later when he took advantage of a turn in the conversation to ask if Manchester had seen Lew Austin the previous evening.

"Not a sign," cheerfully answered the judge.

"I heard that he came over here to see you about the claim of foul."

"I was not here; I was over by the track."

"Only until eight o'clock," reminded Otis.

"True. We were here all the time after that."

"Then Lew should have found you, for he did not come so early as that," added John.

"I did not see him, nor have I heard from him. He probably changed his mind."

"So it seems."

Williamson answered carelessly, and the subject was dropped. The morning meal was given due attention and they were about to rise from the table when a servant suddenly entered without ceremony.

"Judge," he spoke, quickly, "can I see you?"

"You see me now, Amos," jovially returned Manchester. "What is it?"

"I had rather see you in private—"

"I'll be out in a short time."

Delay did not seem to suit the servant. His face bore a white color and a scared look, and he suddenly exclaimed:

"Judge, there's been a terrible tragedy! Lew Austin, the jockey, has been found murdered on the beach."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BODY ON THE BEACH.

The servant made the announcement in deep agitation and he created equal excitement among his hearers. There was just a moment of delay, and then John Williamson bounded to his feet.

"What's that?" he cried, sharply.

"I speak the truth, sir," the servant declared. "Lew Austin has been found murdered."

"Where? When? How?" thundered the man from Oklahoma.

"The body has been found down by the beach. That is all that I can tell you—only it is something terrible, sir."

"Amos, you have been drinking," severely asserted Judge Manchester.

"No, sir; no!"

"Lew Austin killed?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't believe it."

"Look for yourself, if you don't believe me," retorted the servant, angrily.

Williamson took a few long steps and reached his side; he grasped the man's arm tightly.

"Lead the way!" he commanded, hoarsely. "Lew murdered! Great Heavens! I must be dreaming! It can't be I hear right. Lew murdered! Well, by thunder, if he is there will be a shaking up of bones around here. I'll revenge him! I'll bring his slayer to the gallows! I'll kill him with my own hands!"

Williamson was very much excited, and his voice rose from his strong lungs like a peal of miniature thunder. Usually so cool and jovial, he had turned into a relentless avenger in full earnest.

"Be calm," urged the judge. "This may not be so bad as it is represented, you know."

"Go and see for yourself!" snapped Amos, not at all pleased with the remarks around him.

He turned and stalked off in high indignation, but he was not much ahead of Williamson. The latter started without comment, but Manchester called to him.

"One moment, John; we will go with you, Otis and I."

"Hurry up, then!" curtly replied John.

They did not keep him waiting, and the three were soon following the servant, who was moving toward the beach again.

"I don't understand this," said the judge, wonderingly.

"Nor I," added Otis. "It can't be that Lew is dead; there must be some mistake."

"What mistake can there be?" sharply asked John.

"We will see, boys; we will see," suggested Manchester.

Their rapid steps soon took them over the ground. A small group of men were gathered by the water, and all appeared to be looking at some object not yet visible to the advancing trio. There was an air of solemnity about them that was impressive.

One of the party saw the new-comers and hastened to meet them.

"This is terrible!" he declared.

"Is there really a dead man?" inquired Manchester.

"Yes."

"Murdered?"

"Yes."

"And it is Lew Austin, the jockey?"

"It's he. True, the body had thumped on the rocks until the face is bruised past recognition, but the size, hair and general appearance are his, and his clothes have been found on the beach near the body. The remains are quite nude."

John Williamson heard, but did not heed this conversation. He was fast reaching a point where he could see for himself, and he wanted no more second-hand evidence, but when he had arrived fully and did see for himself he found it as the man had described.

The body was there, uncovered and wet with the fog of the night, but first sight brought no positive recognition. The wounds made by the rocks to the face prevented anybody from seeing whether it was a well known face or not, but the finders soon showed that they had not arrived at a decision hastily.

John stopped and looked in silence, but Manchester was full of words from the beginning.

"Shocking, shocking!" he murmured.

"Poor Lew has ridden his last race," added a fisherman.

"Are you sure it is he?"

"Yes. See the hair, size and form. Besides, Lew isn't to be found, and wasn't at his boarding place after supper last night."

"Yet there may be an error."

"These clothes—"

The fisherman had picked up a soaked coat and pair of trousers, but Williamson broke in peremptorily.

"Give them here!"

He snatched them away, and looked hurriedly.

"What do you make of them, John?" asked the judge.

"They're his," admitted the Western man.

"We all said it, sir," replied the fisherman.

John cast them down.

"Murdered, did you say?—murdered?"

"Yes."

"Where's the proof?"

"Look there! See the gash in his head. No rock made that; it is a cut too clean for a rock, and too long by far. It was done by the sweep of some weapon, that took his life at one blow. Then," added the speaker, "he was thrown into the water. They expected the body to drift away and hide the secret, but the tide wasn't with them; it took the remains ashore. Here it is; here is poor Lew!"

There was a murmur of approval from the crowd, and it was plain that all accepted the identification as perfect. John Williamson was there to look for himself, though, and he went over all the ground with careful scrutiny.

He had seen something of life in the West not unlike this, and he tried to bring his own traits into play.

In one way he was foiled. At the point where the body lay there was only sand. This showed that the body had not been cast into the water at that place, for it had been on the rocks. Without a word to any one, John started along the shore. Otis Manchester followed him, noting the keen gaze bent on the ground.

"Have you a clew, John?" asked the bookmaker.

"No."

"I take it you are looking for signs of something."

"Very likely."

Williamson answered curtly, not pleased to have his prospective brother-in-law along then. He wanted to be alone. He mutely accepted the verdict of the men who had known the jockey even longer than he, and his heart was stirred by strong emotions. He was calm outwardly, and in reality, but there was a whirlwind at work within him.

Never yet had he allowed his hand to remain idle when there was a friend to avenge, and he did not intend to make a new record then. The whole current of his thoughts had suddenly changed, and his one impulse was to avenge Lew Austin.

Otis was not discouraged by the short response, and he kept John company and talked freely.

The man from Oklahoma searched with his trailer's skill along the shore until he lost hope. He had found tracks in abundance; too many of them, in fact, for his purpose, and all were mixed up, crossing and recrossing each other. Many persons frequented that vicinity, and they had destroyed his chances unconsciously.

Neither did he find any sign of a struggle.

When he paused Otis looked at him with an appearance of sympathy, and observed:

"The deed may not have been done near here."

"It matters little, if it is really done."

Otis seemed to want to talk soothingly, but John was not in a mood for idle words. He hastened over to where the body was to take another look at it. Two notable additions had been made to the party; a

coroner and a detective were there. Both of these men had known Lew by sight, and both joined in the identification.

The coroner was busy with the body, but the detective, whose name was Leighton Crane, saw things from his point of view.

"Who can throw any light on this subject?" he inquired.

The crowd looked at each other and nobody said anything.

"Who saw the jockey last?" he pursued.

"I saw him at supper," replied one man.

"So did I," added another.

"So much established. What next?"

Again a lull. It was clear that evidence was not coming in rapidly. The detective studied his companions.

"Some of you are connected with racing matters. Don't you know more about Austin? Why was he down this way? Did he come to take a walk? Was he in the habit of taking walks here? Had he a young lady he walked with? Had he friends close to the beach? What could have called him here?"

Suggestions had been thrown out, but the crowd did not catch at them. It was only after a pause that he found a reply at all. Then a jockey hazarded the opinion:

"I don't think he came here to walk. I never knew him to do such a thing. He cared little for the water, and as for the ladies, he never gave them a thought. He was all wrapped up in racing, especially in old Pontiac."

"He must have been killed for his money," suggested Judge Manchester. "He won a race yesterday, you know."

"He would hardly take much money out here."

"He might. I give it as my opinion that he was robbed and made away with by tramps, or some sort of robbers."

John Williamson heard all this, but it gave him no new light. He was wondering how Lew had come to his death. He had started to see Judge Manchester about the wrongful claim of fouling in the race. The judge said he had not seen Lew. Then where had the jockey gone?

The cry heard the previous evening became all the more suggestive as time passed. Was it then that Lew lost his life? Had he, failing to see Manchester, wandered down to the beach and there met the men who gave him the fatal blow?

"I shall have something to say later," thought the man from Oklahoma, "but not now. When I talk it won't be before a gang of goggle-eyed galoots like these."

The officials had made due examination, and the coroner now rose to his feet.

"Remove the body," he directed.

"Where to?" inquired a fisherman.

"Where did he live?"

"At the Horseshoe Hotel."

"It would never do to take it there; the hotel people would not receive it. We have no morgue; we must make one for the occasion."

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT WATCH.

John Williamson started forward quickly.

"No morgue for Lew Austin, unless the law demands it!" he declared. "The boy was as white a man as ever lived, and I'm here as his friend. I backed him in his races; I'll back him now. I don't know what chances this burgh holds out, but I'm ready to pay all bills for Lew. Where can good accommodations be had?"

"I've got a house," remarked one man, "but I don't want no murdered man quartered onter me."

"Nor I," added another.

"Shoot you for skulking coyotes!" exclaimed Williamson. "Who asked you for your old shanties? Why need you say a word if you couldn't say a decent one? Why, it would contaminate the dead boy to lie in your old rookeries!"

John was decidedly warm, and, as he spoke to men of undisputed courage, there might have been trouble had not

Judge Manchester come to the front with even, pacific tones.

"Let me settle that," he suggested. "I have room and to spare, and it shall be freely given. You know the house I occupied before I moved into my present home."

"Yes," replied the coroner.

"Nobody lives there but my overseer, Peter Green, and his small family. There is room and to spare, and I will gladly throw the house open, not only for use while the preliminaries are being settled, but for the funeral, if it be desired. We all feel an interest in poor Lew."

Williamson brought his big hand down heartily on the judge's shoulder, and quite as heartily he exclaimed:

"That's the talk; that's manly. You're white."

"Lew was one of us; he shall not suffer for friends now."

The judge said this with an air of lofty sympathy, and he brought forth a strong murmur of approval from the horsemen present. They had not expected him to take such a step, but they thought it very kind of a rich man to befriend a jockey.

The offer was practical, too, and the body was lifted and borne away. Tender was the touch of the men, for Lew Austin had been liked by all who knew him, and he was sincerely mourned now.

The house to which the procession took their way was a good-sized structure. Once it had been the largest house in the vicinity. As a mansion of the olden time it had seen many festivities and grand parties and receptions had been given within its walls. It was still considered a mansion when Manchester took the notion to build something more modern, but with this change it became the home of his overseer, who could not begin to occupy the whole of it.

The body was borne in and laid in a room which had been idle for two years.

To the place came more horsemen to view the remains, for when the news of the sudden, tragic death was fully known, all desired a view.

Men gathered here and there, too, outside, and talked of the affair. There was much of discussion and wonder, but nothing came out that was regarded as important.

Isaac Winters repeated his statement that Lew had gone to see Judge Manchester about the claim of fouling in the race, but when the judge said he had not seen Lew the subject was dropped.

Detective Leighton Crane was busy with his efforts to throw light on the mystery, and he was not the only one who tried to unravel it. Others took a hand, and among them was John Williamson.

The man from Oklahoma sincerely mourned for his friend, but he was too practical to let grief make him idle. His was a practical nature, and he remained for hours near the beach. All of his skill at following a trail was brought into use, but it was useless in this case.

He found no sign that Lew had been on the beach, and no sign of a struggle. He persevered, and it was because of this that he was on that stretch of land late in the afternoon.

He was wandering along so intently that he nearly ran into another man before he discovered his presence. When he did see him he pulled up short.

It was not an agreeable figure that was before him.

He saw a short, thick-set man of middle age, and one who might have been all right in the eyes of mankind, if he had done as much for himself as nature had done. Something had reddened his face suspiciously, however, and made his garments little more than tatters.

The person was a tramp, and of the radical sort. He was ragged, dirty, shaggy of hair and beard, and a big nose made his face appear as if a signal light of red had been set in front of it.

If he was in hard luck he was not abashed, and he smiled a vague smile and spoke in a wheezy voice.

"Lookin' fer somethin', boss?"

"Where did you come from?" John demanded.

"Bed!" was the laconic reply.

"Have you been asleep at this hour of the day?"

"Boss, I sleep at all hours except when I wake up, an' that's what the trouble is. Ef I could sleep like Rip Van Winkle I would give a pile out o' my inheritance. Happy Rip! No stomach ter feed, no clothes ter wear, no bones ter ache, no head ter think. Nothin' but jest ter sleep."

"Say!" replied John, looking at the red nose. "he hadn't any whisky to drink."

A smile stole over the tramp's face.

"I didn't think o' that. Life wasn't all fun with Rip. He slept twenty years an' never had no drink. He was hard up, an' so be I. He hadn't no whisky ter drink—an' I haven't none, either."

"Don't look so wishful; I don't carry the article."

"Nor do I. Stranger, my stomach aches ter carry it, but it hasn't none ter carry."

"Never mind that. Have you been here long?"

"Thirty years."

"I didn't mean that. Where have you slept?"

"On the sand in a niche among the rocks, a mile away. Terrible walk from there here."

"Did you sleep there long?"

"What day o' the week is it?"

"Tuesday."

"I went ter sleep on Friday."

"I suppose you have slept ever since?"

"Yes," seriously replied the tramp.

"You are a good liar."

"It's true as you live, boss."

"Then I won't cast the least doubt on your veracity," grimly observed Williamson. "Now, I dare say you can see and show me just where you were all this while—"

"Sure, boss. I'll take you there; it was down yender."

"Of course you know nothing of what happened last night—"

"Nothin' happened around me."

"How do you know, if you were asleep?"

"Why, boss," replied the tramp, with an air of surprise, "can't a feller see an' hear when he's asleep?"

"Can you?"

"I can that."

"Then tell me if there was any disturbance around your section during last night? Did you hear any outcry? Or see anything unusual? Tell me all you did see and hear."

"It wouldn't fill a book. I was powerful sleepy, last night, but ef there had been anything uncommon it would 'a' woke me up. There wasn't nothin'. I see several vessels sail by, but they was right on the go, an' nothin' uncommon about them."

"What's your name?"

"Dickey Spicer, boss."

"Are you an honest man?"

"No, boss. I hev' had a powerful sight o' temptation ter leave the straight an' narrer road o' dishonesty, though. Ministers, lawyers, doctors, politicians an' them other respectable fellers hev' tried hard ter get me inter their way o' thinkin'. 'Come, Dickey, come,' they would say, 'be one o' us; be honest, an' you kin wear good clothes like us.' Widders an' orfins hev' took up the refrain, sayin', 'Come, Dickey, come,' until the woods an' valleys rang with the beseechin's, but I wasn't ter be lured astray. In spite o' all temptations I remain dishonest."

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed John. "I reckon I don't want anything of you. Your views and mine don't tie up together well, but you should be in a circus with a two-headed cow and the bearded woman. That's what you should."

"Be they of good principles? Be they proof against honesty?"

Williamson did not answer. He studied his companion closely. Mr. Spicer was a tramp, and he was ragged and dirty, but, though the suggestion had been thrown out that a tramp might have killed Lew

Austin, John did not feel like suspecting Dickey.

The man was a vagabond, but he did not look vicious.

He became desirous of parting company with the mass of dirt and did so without much ceremony. Walking off abruptly, he left Dickey standing on the beach.

The remainder of the afternoon passed uneventfully.

When night fell somebody happened to mention that a watcher was needed by the body, and Williamson was heard from immediately.

"I'll watch," he announced, promptly.

"I wouldn't do that," answered Judge Manchester.

"It won't hurt me a bit, and I owe the duty to poor Lew."

"I can supply faithful servants."

"So shall I be faithful."

"I don't doubt that, John, but why waste your strength in this oppressive weather? Can't you and I render better service to Lew by searching for clues to-morrow?"

"I shall search just the same. A night off on my sleep won't prevent me from being active to-morrow."

"Why not let a couple of the jockeys have the chance? They all liked Lew well."

"So did I, and I am the man for the job. Lew was my personal friend, and I won't desert him now. I'll watch!"

This was said in such a way that Manchester submitted gracefully.

"All right, if you wish it so; I don't object, certainly. We will do all we can to make the night endurable for you. A lunch for the small hours, and a bottle of some reviving drink will not come in amiss, all of which you shall have."

Thus was it decided. Williamson spent the evening with Mabel, who was duly sympathetic, but Judge Manchester and Otis were absent, being engaged with the detective in trying to get light on the tragedy which had cast gloom over the place.

John's prospective relative seemed zealous in the work, and they were emphatic in declaring they would find the assassins.

Shortly after nine o'clock Williamson started to begin his vigil, and he was soon at the old mansion and ready for business.

CHAPTER VI.

A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

The former home of the Manchesters stood about four minutes' walk from the new mansion. John Williamson had never been in the old building, though it was familiar enough to him by sight.

On this occasion he was received at the door by the overseer, Peter Green, a plain, sensible-looking man of middle age.

"Come right in," directed Peter. "Everything is ready for you, sir. The judge has sent over a supper for you, and we've put it in an outside room where you can keep it hot if you want. You can make yourself as free as you want to, for my family is small and the house is large. You can rattle around all you wish, and it won't disturb us; we shall not hear a thing."

"I am not likely to rattle around much," dryly replied John, "but your goodwill is appreciated."

"Will you go to the room now, sir?"

"Right away. Lead on."

Peter obeyed. In a scantily furnished room the body of the murdered man lay on a table, covered with a cloth. A big chair and a lounge for the watcher completed the arrangements for the night.

When he was left alone the Western man sat down in the chair and looked the room over.

He glanced at the mute object on the table.

"Poor Lew!" he murmured. "Poor Lew!"

He went over the many good things he had noted in his friend's nature since their acquaintance began, and felt that he had sustained a deep loss in the jockey's death.

"Who could have done it? He started to see Manchester, but did not see him. Now, where did Lew go? What did he say to me, anyhow, during our last interview. I asked him where he was going, and he said 'Home!' That don't tell anything. I don't remember that he told me more. Did he? Humph! I remember he spoke curiously to me about Chase Manchester. 'Beware of the judge!' he said. The dickens! What did Lew mean?"

The point was meditated upon, but nothing came of it.

"He was very serious, asked me if I was sure the judge was my friend, and intimated that he did not think he was. 'Beware of the judge!' Now, that was a queer thing for him to say, for he was not reckless of speech. What did he mean?"

Long and carefully John meditated on the point, but it all came to nothing. The warning had an unpleasant effect on his mind, and he finally dismissed it from consideration. He lighted a cigar and sat down by the open window to keep his vigil.

Time passed. The few persons who were passing disappeared, and others did not come in their places. Quietude, silence and gloom reigned outside. A clock struck twelve.

John yawned and stretched himself.

"At least seven hours more of it," he muttered. "Well, I've kept watch in the mines and on the prairie, and I can stand it here. Still, it's a bit lonesome."

"Why not let me help ye out, boss?"

It was a quiet voice behind the Western man, and John wheeled abruptly. The room was a corner one, and windows were on both sides. In one of the other windows a man sat as cool as ice, his seat the easiest in the world, and his legs dangling inside the room.

"Dickey Spicer!" exclaimed John.

"That's my cognomen, boss," agreed the tramp serenely.

"What are you doing here?"

"Settin' down."

"How did you get here?"

"Clumb up."

"Who knows you are here?"

"You do."

"Who else?"

"I do, an' that's all. Nobody else ain't needed. Why should they be? You an' me are old chums. I feel as ef I'd known you fer years, an' mebbe I hev'. Mebbe I hev' slept fer a couple of years sence I seen you last—I don't keep the run o' things. Lemme see ef I kin tell. I keep this here with me."

Dickey drew out an almanac, opened its leaves, and studied it seriously for some time.

"Eighteen hundred and ninety-one," he then spoke. "Is that the current anny domino?"

"Your almanac is three years behind date."

"Then I've slept fer three years sence I seen you, fer this book was up ter date the last time I met ye. Three years' sleep. I suspected it, an' that makes us old friends. Boss, shake!"

Dickey advanced confidently and extended a dirty hand, but Williamson spoke sharply.

"Stop!"

"Stop here, or about here, do ye mean?"

"You unwashed sinner, you are an intruder here. How dare you enter unbidden?"

"Because I knew I wouldn't be bidden. That's my name. Napoleon won fame by gettin' there any way he could, an' I am on the same trail."

"Are you a thief?"

"I am. I've been besought by some ter abandon the manly callin', but I've resisted temptation right sturdy."

"Jump out of that window before I throw you out."

"Don't do that, boss; don't! I only come in ter see old scenes."

"Old scenes?"

"Yes. I know every panel o' this room an' every board in the floor, an' every nail in the wall. Oh! this was once my playground and peaceful home."

"You never were here before. You lie, and you know it."

Dickey really looked grieved. Reproachfully he gazed at his accuser for a moment; then his gaze wandered about the room until, the circuit completed, it came back again.

"Boss," he answered, slowly, "the proof o' the puddin' is in the eatin'. Mebbe I could tell you some things about this room you don't know yourself."

"Dickey, you are a pretty good sort of a humbug, but I don't care to entertain you now. Get out!"

"Boss, I'll go directly, ef you say so, but my dishonor has been questioned—I mean, my honor an' veracity. You say I don't know nothin' about this place, an' never was here before. I'll show ye. Look around this room. Do you see much in it?"

"No."

"Do you know o' more than ye see?"

"No."

"Wouldn't suppose there was movable panels in these walls, would ye, boss?"

"Decidedly not."

"I'll show ye."

Dickey moved forward to the wall at one point, and touched the panel. Williamson watched curiously. The fact that the tramp was anxious to put things to the test could not help impressing him.

Dickey fumbled awhile, and then the panel he touched was turned back like a door, revealing a recess behind it. He faced John with a bland smile on his dirty visage.

"Mebbe I never have been here before," he added.

Williamson walked forward. There was nothing startling about the recess. It was absolutely empty, and would have looked prosaic enough had it not been for the strangeness of the place, in John's estimation.

"Well, this smacks of old-time mystery and magic," he confessed, wonderingly.

"Not at all," replied Dickey. "This ain't no robber castle, with hidden maidens an' jimeracks, but jest a plain recess fer household things. I've seen that hole filled with bottles o' liquors, an' with books an' with jewels, an' with all sorts o' things put in fer the time bein'."

"You have, eh? How do you happen to know so much about this old mansion?"

"Boss, we all hev' ter rise in the world. Before I originated the doctrine o' sleep an' sech, an' become the apostle o' rest, I was a servant here. I blush ter confess it, but it's true. A plebeian servant, by gum!"

"Oh, so you're a cast-off of Manchester's, are you?"

"Huh!"

Dickey sniffed scornfully, but, without reply, went to another point and opened another recess. Like its companion it was empty. John was surprised, and he questioned the tramp further, whereupon he was informed that it was a freak of the early builder to have such recesses all over the house, not for any unlawful or criminal purpose, but because it was a plan conceived by an eccentric mind to put things out of the way, and that it had always been held to in his day, if not longer.

"The places are as thick as flies," pursued Dickey, "an' I ain't sure any livin' persons could locate all o' them. The old owner died twenty-five years ago, an' none o' the old servants are left, ez near ez I kin find out."

"A queer freak."

"Yes."

Dickey went to a new point along the wall and began to fumble. In the absence of knobs he pulled at the projections of the panels.

"There should be one somewheres here. I remember seein' it often. Ah! here we be!"

The panel swung back.

"Hello! this thing ain't empty. Quite a lot o' truck inside. Papers, queer drawin's, letters, an' the like. Must have been overlooked and forgot. Findin's are keepin's, an' these will be ours, boss. Now, here is a picture—a photograph o' a man—"

He held it up, but Williamson, who had been standing near, interested enough to look at a distance, and no more, suddenly gave a shout, and dashed forward to the

tramp's side. He snatched the photograph from Dickey's hand.

"What's this?" he cried, excitedly.

"Well, it looks ter be a feller's picture, don't it?"

"Where did you get it? But I saw—I saw! Great Heavens! this picture here—here! It is my father's likeness!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL OF AN OLD TRAGEDY.

Dickey Spicer turned a blankly wondering face toward his companion.

"You don't say so?" he mildly responded. "You'll excuse me fer opening the cubbord; I didn't know you put the things in there."

"I didn't," cried Williamson, excitedly. "I put nothing in there; I never heard of, or knew of the place before. Man, is this some trick on me?"

"A trick? Land sakes, no! You know all about it that I do."

The momentary suspicion was cleared away from Williamson's mind, and his regard returned to the photograph. He was a cool man usually, but he was stirred up strongly now. He gazed at the picture with enlarged eyes, and the bit of paste-board shook in his grasp.

"The picture here!" he exclaimed. "Great Heavens! What does it mean?"

"Dear me, I don't know. Is it so very strange?"

"Strange! Why, man, it is amazing, startling, appalling!"

"Great Jinks! You don't say so."

"There is more there! What?"

John pushed Dickey so violently that he almost overturned him, and himself gained the opening. His trembling hands fumbled at the remaining objects in the recess.

"Another picture!" muttered Dickey.

"It's a woman's—"

"My mother!" cried Williamson.

"Thunder! How did they get here?"

"My mother, my mother," murmured the explorer.

His strong face softened, and he bent and pressed a kiss on the fair face pictured there, but he was in a mood to go further. Arousing, his hands sought the recess again.

"Papers, with all sorts o' lines an' angles drawn over 'em," added Dickey, watching the result.

"Mechanical drawings," explained John. "My father used to do such things."

"Well, well, well."

"Amazing discovery. Here is more—"

"Letters, an' addressed in female writin' ter Mr. Exol Williamson."

"My father's name—my mother's writing!" pursued John feverishly.

"Jimmy Hill, you don't say so. How did they get here?"

"Just what I want to know," interrupted the man from Oklahoma, not calming down in the least. "Man, what do you know about this?"

He wheeled upon the tramp, seized him in a tenacious grasp, and made Dickey writhe with pain as his strong fingers closed.

"I dun'no', I dun'no'! Why should I know? This ain't my funeral. I didn't put them there, an' I didn't know ye'r parients, by gum! Lemme go, lemme go! You're breakin' my biceps an' laceratin' my cuticle! Oh! Outch!"

"You know something—"

"I don't! I don't! Lemme go! What's all this fuss about, anyhow?"

"Man," pursued Williamson, like a cyclone, "my father disappeared with these things in his possession. He disappeared, and we believe he was murdered. Now, why—why are these things here—here?" he shouted.

Believing that his pains were the most important thing to be considered, the tramp had been simply dancing under the heavy pressure of the unconsciously merciless fingers, but he now stopped short and forgot his distress.

"Murdered!" he muttered. "Your father murdered—here?"

"I don't know where. Was it here? was it?" excitedly cried Williamson.

"Boss, you've got me on the run. I

can't tell a thing unless I go off an' sleep a few weeks—"

"My father was in New York—or we believed him to be in New York, and he disappeared mysteriously and suddenly. After a long while we got word that a man who had died of drowning was probably he, and the body was sent to us, but this was two months after the man was drowned. We buried the clay, and we believed it to be ours, though there was no proof, and we never got any light. It has been a dark mystery for twenty years. Now—now comes this discovery. What are my father's papers—his cherished effects—doing in this niche?"

John had grown vehement and impetuous again, and Dickey wilted under the flood of rapid speech.

"I dun'no', I dun'no'," he helplessly replied.

"How did you know of this recess?"

"Why, I worked here."

"Do you tell the truth?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"Come here first some twenty-four years ago. I was an innocent kid then, ye see, an'—"

"Who owned the house then?"

"Uncle Moses Appleton."

"Where is he?"

"Dead!"

"Did he die lately?"

"Bless ye, no. It was over twenty years ago."

"Who bought him out?"

"Chase Manchester."

"When?"

"Well, it was all o' twenty years ago. I can't tell jest how long. Yes, it was jest about twenty, for I've been gone about that, an' I only stayed with Manchester a little while."

Williamson's brow contracted.

"Manchester was owner here twenty years ago—when these letters were written—when my father disappeared?"

"It appears from the evidence that it is so, boss."

"You were here when the place changed hands. What happened then?"

"Why, the new owner settled down here—that's all. The judge, he was a patent lawyer then—"

"What?"

"He was a lawyer feller that got patents fer inventors."

"He was—he was?" and again John gripped the tramp's arm until Dickey writhed anew.

"Oh, come now, boss, don't do that," he implored. "You will crack the dirt all off my arm, an' then I'll catch cold, sure."

Williamson suddenly realized that he was proceeding without due control of himself, and the iron of his nature came to the surface once more. Governing himself by a powerful effort he led Dickey to the easy chair and planted him down there rather unceremoniously.

"I want you to tell me all about the coming of Judge Manchester here. I want to know how he came, and all about it. Turn your mind back to the past and let me know all you can recall, and you shall lose nothing by it. See?"

The speaker exposed a roll of bills, but Dickey remained phlegmatic. He coughed and quietly answered:

"I sleep so much that I ain't got much use fer money—I rarely eat or drink. As a personal favor I'll do all you say, an' ef you want to give me a few million dollars I won't kick."

"Go ahead!"

Dickey tried to obey, but he did not open with celerity. He laid aside his battered old hat and stirred up his shaggy hair until it was a mountain of tangled curves and angles, and finally he got in motion.

"Yes, I worked for old Moses Appleton. I was young then, a mere kid, an' not ter blame fer workin'; I've got over it now. I've reformed, ye see. I was butler's assistant, then—the family was right rich an' swell."

"Uncle Moses, he took an apoplexy an' died, an' then the place was sold. It was said that the new owner paid only a small part cash, but he wiped out the mortgage

inside o' six months—he got more money somehow, I reckon. He was a smart, hustlin' man, an' it was natural he should."

"When he come he had a wife along with him, but I s'pose she has died since. Then there was his children—Otis, some five years old, an' Mabel—she was a kid. Mebbe she was two years old then. That was all his family—no, there was the feller who worked on patents."

Williamson here broke in.

"What fellow?"

"I've forgot his name, but he was a great chap ter study an' hang ter things. Why, he spent all his time in this room, poring over his models an' drawin's."

"In this room?" cried John.

"Yes."

"What became of him?"

"He went back ter the city ter live. It was too far from the city fer his work ter be well done."

"Who said so?"

"Manchester said so, after he went. I was quite chummy with the inventor—leastwise, he was always kind ter me, an' not stuck up. A nice feller he was—but he went without a word o' good-by ter me. Took an early train one mornin' before I seen him, an' off he posted. His baggage was took to the station, an' that was the last we seen of him. I stayed with Manchester three months longer, but he was as cranky as a kickin' steer—got so all of a sudden—an' he just sort of fired me out. That's all I know."

John had been listening eagerly, drinking in each word, and anxious to ask more questions. Dickey ceased, and John came swiftly into the conversation.

"Were these niches in the wall open then?"

"Jimmy Hill! I really can't say, after so many years, but I don't remember their bein' used by Manchester's people at all."

"But did the inventor know of them?"

"That I can't say."

"Who was he? Who was that inventor?"

"His name is all gone from me."

John thrust one of the envelopes under the tramp's eyes.

"Look at that! Read the name. Study it. Think! Exol Williamson! Was that the name of the inventor?"

"Shoot me ef I don't think it was!"

"And this picture? Was that his?"

The tramp began to rouse from his lethargy, and he surveyed the pictured face sharply. Then his own dull visage lighted up perceptibly.

"Yes!" he cried. "That's him! That's the inventor—that's the man who used this room, and who went away so sudden. Exol Williamson! Yes, that's his name, sure."

"Would you swear to it?"

"Yes."

"Then," cried John, "you shall some time have the chance. I have struck the trail of an old tragedy—one of vital interest to me. Man, this is more interesting to me than my own life. Exol Williamson was my father. I think he died by violence. I now live for revenge!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SWORN TO VENGEANCE.

Vehement was this outburst from the Oklahoma sport, but Dickey Spicer surveyed him with equanimity. It was not Dickey's relative who was concerned and suspected of having been violently made away with, and it is doubtful if the tramp would have become excited if all of his relatives, present and past, had been in danger of meeting with violent deaths.

Dickey meditated and then slowly asked:

"If your father was murdered, who did it?"

The name was on John's lips, but he suddenly remembered he was with a stranger of most disreputable rank in life, and he checked the rash speech.

"That's it, who?" he answered.

"Out with it, boss," encouragingly replied the tramp. "You are thinkin' Chase Manchester; why not say it?"

"Judge Manchester? Why, you surprise me."

"No, I don't," chuckled Dickey. "That's jest what you think. It is in yer mind that Chase killed yer father. Mebbe he did. I never knew Manchester ter do a bloodthirsty thing, but good men are scarce in this world. It would be funny ef he did kill him, fer—ain't I heard it said you are engaged ter the judge's daughter?"

John started. The fact came to him with telling force. Was it possible he had engaged himself to the daughter of the man who killed his father?

"But then," added the tramp, "that can't all be so. Ef it was, the judge wouldn't be your friend."

John Williamson started to his feet. To his memory came the words spoken to him by Lew Austin during their last interview—"Are you sure Manchester is your friend?"—and then the even more significant addition: "Beware of the judge!"

The recollection was startling to John now, and he stood looking at vacancy with emotion strange for him. What had Lew known when he uttered that significant warning? It had been spoken gravely and earnestly, and Lew was not the man to jest.

He had known something. What?

Cool as the man from Oklahoma was, he was bewildered and excited then. It was serious enough to believe he was on the track of his father's murderers, but if it was also true that fate had led him to meet the daughter of that murderer, and then drift on in the course that had followed the meeting, it was simply remarkable and startling.

Dickey waited patiently for him to return to business.

"Can you tell me more?" presently asked John.

"No, but I kin help you."

"How?"

"You've got a fight ahead o' you."

"Have I?"

"Yes, with Manchester."

"I do not admit it."

"You think it. You'll wade in ter revenge yerself onter him, an' you kin bet high that Chase Manchester will see your bet an' go you one better while his mon' lasts. You're in fer a big fight. Why not take me as yer lieutenant?"

John surveyed his companion more attentively. Dickey had once possessed a good, muscular figure and a good face, but it was long ago. Now, strong drink had spoiled the face, and rags and dirt made him generally offensive to the eye. Surely, he was a most unenviable ally, but if Williamson was not prepared to accept him formally as a friend, he would have been most reluctant to lose sight of the dirty vagabond.

"Let us go more into details," suggested John. "I want to know all you can tell about this affair of the past."

The tramp was not reluctant, but he said with truth that twenty years was a long time to throw the memory back on matters that had never seemed important to him. Still, he did his best, and John questioned him carefully.

They only added trifling things to the previous discoveries.

Dickey grew more emphatic in identifying the picture and the name on the envelopes, and he told how Exol Williamson had come to the house with Manchester and pursued his work in the room they now occupied for the night.

The inventor had worked almost constantly, making drawings on paper and delving deep into science. Often Manchester would visit him, but the latter did not seem to have any part in the development of the work under way.

The abrupt going of the inventor lost nothing under repetition. On the contrary, it grew more suspicious. Exol Williamson had been in the house one evening. He was seen there no more, but Manchester announced that he had gone on an early train. His baggage had been taken to the depot—and that was the last of him.

John looked around the room.

"Was my father murdered in this very place?" he wondered.

Dickey had a period of meditation, and then suddenly aroused.

"Why was these things left here?" he asked, pointing to the articles they had taken from the recess.

"Just what I want to know."

"Manchester didn't know o' the recess!" decided the tramp.

"I think so, too."

"Then the inventor must hev' put them inter it."

"Mournful thought!"

John sighed and picked up the package of letters. The well known penmanship of his dead mother added to the gloom of the moment. He mechanically untied the string that bound the package. From the midst of the collection a separate slip of paper dropped out.

He picked it up and looked with curiosity. Words were written there in bold characters and John read quickly:

"This tenth day of June, 1874, I finish my model of the improved appliance for making writing papers. If nothing goes wrong it will make me a rich man, but I have fears and doubts—doubts of Chase Manchester. Last night I caught him here, surreptitiously looking over the complete plans. What was his purpose? I have doubted the man; I have thought he might intend to steal my invention. We quarreled, and now there is a lurking devil in his eyes. I doubt the man! I fear for my invention. I should fear for myself if I were not his equal in physical strength. He has posed as my patron, but I may lose all if I do not take good care to defend my rights. I am going to write to a wealthy New York manufacturer to come down and see my invention—I dare not leave here, lest Manchester seize the chance and steal my model and plans. I fear the man.

"EXOL WILLIAMSON."

Dickey had been watching interestedly. He now asked:

"What does it say?"

"I wish you could tell me just when the inventor left here so suddenly."

"It was twenty years ago. I can't."

"You say that, though Manchester mortgaged his house when he purchased it, he soon had money to pay off the mortgage?"

"Yes."

"How did he get it?"

"Don't know."

John believed he did. He held in his hand the paper in his father's writing, in which he expressed fear of the patent-lawyer of that day. Had he put the papers into the recess only the night before he went out of sight forever?

One thing John knew without prompting. The last letter from Exol Williamson to his wife was written the eighth of June, 1874. After that no word ever came from him direct, and the supposed drowning followed.

"Dickey," suddenly added the young man, "how long have you been in this section, this time?"

"Two days."

"How long do you intend to remain?"

"I have an engagement ter be in Skowhegan, Maine, next month."

"Is it a pressing engagement?"

"It will be then. You see, I am going there ter sleep. It's a boss place ter sleep; everybody does it there. I've got ter git rest, an' that's the place."

"I think your engagement will keep," dryly remarked John. "I understand that your talk about sleeping is all bosh."

"Oh! my dear sir, not at all. No, sir; not at all. That's my line o' business. I am the gentle apostle o' sleep an' rest. I leave the rude, rough world, at times, an' settle down ter sleep a day, or a month, or a year, as the case may be."

"You keep flesh well for a man who does that."

"I grow fat on it. Nothing is better fer the physical an' mental bein' than a month's rest in slumber. When thus occupied I grow physically an' morally. My body gits bigger, an' so does my brain. Once I had no sleep fer a whole month. My brain got so restless that it beat an' thumped like a bass drum, an' a

man who heard it gave an alarm an' the whole fire department come an' played their hoses an' pipes onter me ter put me out."

Dickey was nothing if not serious, and he seemed to believe his own claim, but John abruptly broke in.

"We wander. I want you to stay in this section."

"Mebbe I kin."

"I want you within reach, and I will make it pay you handsomely if you will do two things—first, be ever at my call; secondly, keep utterly silent in this matter."

"All right, boss."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Don't forget," cautioned the man from Oklahoma. "This is something very serious to me. Will you swear to be faithful to me?"

"Yes, boss."

"And to be silent?"

"Yes."

"Here is enough money for your present needs."

John extended a generous handful of coins. Dickey looked at them solemnly, and then shook his head.

"I don't think I will take them. It is cheaper ter sleep than any other way, an' a sin ter spend money. I grow when I'm asleep, an' shrivel when I'm awake. I won't take it—or maybe I will!"

Swiftly the vagabond's hand shot out, and he clasped the coins as if they were long-lost brothers.

"It might hurt ye'r feelin's ef I refused," he added.

Williamson had grown accustomed to the eccentricities of his companion, and he allowed this freak to pass uncommented upon.

After some further conversation he suggested that the tramp take his departure, but Dickey pleaded for shelter until a time as near morning as was safe, and John finally acquiesced.

Disdaining the lounge, Dickey lay down on the floor and fell asleep as readily and quietly as an infant. The dead might be around him, and the shadow of crime and mystery might be over everything, but it mattered little to him. He slept; he was happy.

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE OVER THE RACE-HORSE.

John Williamson sat in his chair and looked at Dickey. The ill-favored man was not a wholesome companion, but the man from Oklahoma would not have lost sight of him under any condition. Ragged and dirty as Dickey was, he was the chief element in the outlook for the future, and his dirt was not so offensive as it otherwise would have been.

John was in a very confused state. Events had pressed so swiftly upon him, and so surprisingly, and there was so much which was not clear, that he did not know where he stood in many things, and those that seemed the plainest were most astonishing.

"Can it be," wondered John, for the twentieth time, "that I am in the room where my father was killed?—the guest of the man who killed him?"

He rose with a species of nervousness, went to the table and was about to lift the cloth that covered the dead face. Then he remembered that the cruel blows of the rocks had bruised the face so much that it would be useless investigation.

"Poor Lew!" he murmured. "You were a white man, every inch! Honest men honor the world and make life worth living. You ought to have lived, Lew—for your sake and mine."

A pause; then the Western man added:

"He asked me if I was sure that Manchester was my friend, and he said to me, 'Beware of the judge!' What did Lew know? He had learned something, all of a sudden. What? 'Beware of the judge!' What did it mean? Pity he didn't live to tell me what he meant. I wonder how I can supply the missing link? Whom did he see after he met me? He did not come to meet the Manchesters, but he met somebody who had a mo-

tive for killing him. Who was it? Who—"

The speaker stopped short. If Lew had learned unfavorable things of Chase Manchester, or penetrated his secrets, and the judge knew of the fact—a startling suspicion was developed.

"Can it be," cried John, "that the Judge killed him? He held important secrets. Manchester says he did not see him, yet Manchester's whereabouts during the evening are accounted for only on his own statement. Where was he? Did he see Lew, really? Did they meet, and was Lew then killed?"

A few days before Williamson had thought well of Chase Manchester. He had no reason to do otherwise. As the father of Mabel he was bound to receive a degree of goodwill from the lover, and, though John never had been specially taken with him, he had regarded him with respect.

Now, all was changed, and he was ready enough to suspect.

"Did the judge know that Lew held his secret, and did it cost the poor boy his life?"

Nervously the Western man walked the floor. Then another sudden thought caused him to stop abruptly.

"Say, if my suspicions are correct, the judge must have known who I was from the beginning. The name would arouse his interest and suspicion, if he killed my father, and I now remember that, soon after I came here, he asked me the name of my father. He did it skillfully—said he had once known an older John Williamson, and all that sort of thing. Was he then seeking light? By Jove! I'll bet he knows that I am the son of the man he killed!"

It was a fresh cause for disturbance, and it gave rise to more.

"If that is so, my own life may be in peril, too!"

Back and forth across the floor, but the movement was not one of alarm or dismay. John Williamson was too courageous to yield to craven fear.

"Humph!" he finally murmured; "it is an interesting situation if I am the guest of the man who killed my father, and that man knows who I am. He may try to make it hot for me!"

It need scarcely be said that John did not grow sleepy that night. He had too much to think about to do that. Dickey slept on, but when daylight began to make itself visible his companion aroused him. Dickey came up bright and cheerful.

"You must go now," announced John.

"All right, Mr. Policeman—oh! it's you, is it?"

"Yes. Day is near."

Dickey pulled out his dirty, well-thumbed almanac.

"What year?" he asked, gravely.

"Eighteen hundred ninety-four."

"Then I've slept two years this spell. I feel quite rested, an' I guess," feeling of his head, "that my brain has growed a bit, too. I am the gentle apostle o' sleep an' rest—"

"Are you a man of your word?"

"Boss, I belong ter one o' the first families o' New York—F. F., N. Y., ye see—an' my word is as good as my credit."

"Hold up your hand!"

"Up she goes, boss."

"Swear to be faithful to me!"

"I swear!"

"Swear not to leave here until I tell you to go. Swear not to tell any human being what we have learned this night."

"I swear!"

Dickey was prompt enough. In fact, that was his only failing. He took the oath with a lightness that did not speak strongly for his devotion to the pledge, but Williamson could not better the situation.

He bundled the tramp out of the window and told him to go, but to be near enough to be found. Dickey went, almanac in hand.

John gave some further attention to the papers that had been found in the niche. The note written by Exol Williamson and some of the letters from his

mother, and a part of the drawings, he concealed on his person, but the whole lot was too cumbersome to be carried off then.

"I'll come again," he decided, "and convey all to a safety deposit vault."

He replaced them in the niche and closed the panel.

Then he was ready for day, and it was not long before steps outside were followed by the appearance of Peter Green.

"Well, sir," he spoke. "I've come to relieve you."

"All right; I'll willingly give you the position."

"How have you got through it?"

"Good! I am an old borderman."

"A wild life."

"Pleasant, though. I dare say you never tried it. But then, I presume you have been with Mr. Manchester many years."

"Only ten years."

"That's a good while. I'll bet something there are but few of his servants that have been here longer."

"I am the only old hand on the place, sir. Not one of the others has been here five years. The judge used to be great on changing his help often."

John thought it possible that Chase Manchester had a motive in this, but he said no more. Leaving the watch to Peter, he hastened to the new mansion to get two hours' sleep before breakfast, and even his disturbed condition of mind did not prevent the success of his plan.

Accustomed to wild life and its accompaniments as he was, this short period of rest did all that was pressingly necessary for him, and he appeared at the breakfast table looking fresh and cheerful. All the family were there.

"Well, how are you feeling?" asked the judge, with a show of bluff kindness.

"I'm in great shape," replied John.

"Such a watch is trying."

"I've been through worse."

"I dare say the night passed peacefully."

"Yes."

"No callers?"

"No."

"I didn't know but Detective Crane might drop in."

"He didn't come."

"We must all give our aid to him, as far as possible. I am called upon to do it, anyhow, since I am a racing judge, and we shall all enter zealously into the work because we liked Lew Austin so well."

"That's the sort of talk I like," answered John, heartily. "Lew was a fine chap, and we must help in the case. I know nothing of detective work, and it may be the same with you, but we can encourage Crane and offer due rewards for the discovery of the murderer—at least, I am going to put up a thousand dollars of my own."

"I'll add the same sum."

"Good! That will stir Crane up to his besticks."

"He must do his best," declared Manchester. "The guilty man must be found and punished."

This seeming unanimity of feeling made both John and the judge look at peace with the world and themselves. The man from Oklahoma was acting his part well, and nothing told of his suspicions against his host.

Breakfast was eaten in a deliberate way. After that the three men went to the hotel where, they knew, there would be a gathering of those interested in the case.

Crane was there, but he frankly admitted that he had nothing to report thus far. Other men had plenty to say, but no new developments followed.

John saw Dickey at a distance, but the tramp made no effort to be prominent, nor did he seem to see John at all.

"I'm going around to the stable to look at Pontiac," announced Williamson, presently. "Will you go with me?"

The question was addressed to the judge, and both he and Otis kept the Western man company. When they reached the door of the stable John was surprised to see Verplanck Jones, the man with whom he had quarreled on the grounds, standing there in conversation with the grooms, but thought nothing of it until he drew near enough to hear their words.

"Yes," Jones was saying, "I have a claim on the horse, and I am going to take him away."

"But," urged Buck Coleman, a man who had been Lew Austin's trainer. "I can't agree to that."

"It makes no difference whether you do or not!" roughly returned Jones. "I am going to take Pontiac off."

John Williamson had lost no part of this talk, and suddenly moved forward.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

Jones turned a supercilious glance upon the questioner and disdained a reply, but Buck Coleman eagerly welcomed the new arrival.

"He claims Pontiac, Mr. Williamson."

"Does he? Well, he can't have Pontiac."

Verplanck Jones grew angry. His eyes sparkled, and he exclaimed:

"I am going to take the horse away from this stable, and do it now."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," retorted Williamson. "The horse belongs in this stable, and here he stays. I am the man who is responsible for him. The person who tries to take him must fight me!"

"Then fight it is," cried Jones. "I'm going to have Pontiac!"

CHAPTER X.

PONTIAC AND HIS RIVAL CLAIMANTS.

It was a meeting of two hot-blooded men, and trouble of a decisive nature seemed sure to follow, but Judge Manchester came into the conversation with mild manner and speech.

"Wait a bit, gentlemen," he requested. "There may be no necessity for a clash when we get the merits of the case. Let us be slow to proceed to extremities. I know you are both reasonable men when you get away from the post right. If you make a poor start, you will both be among the ruck at the finish. Ha, ha!"

With this humble little joke the judge suddenly relapsed into dignity.

"Mr. Jones," he added, "we don't understand your claim. Your honor is unimpeachable, but what is your claim?"

"Lew Austin died owing me a thousand dollars, and I want to recover it," replied Verplanck.

"Owed you a thousand?" cried Williamson. "I don't believe it!"

"Be calm, John; be calm," requested Manchester. "How, Mr. Jones, did he happen to owe it?"

"He borrowed the money of me, a week ago."

"The thunder he did!" exclaimed John, bluntly. "Lew wasn't borrowing from anybody, and if he wanted it, I was the man to give it."

"Wait, wait!" urged the judge. "We do not doubt you, Mr. Jones—"

"I do!" broke in Williamson.

"But can you prove the claim?" pursued Manchester.

"Here is Lew's note."

Verplanck Jones had been keeping quiet with an effort, though he shot most unfriendly glances at Williamson. He now produced a paper, and several pairs of eyes studied it. It was a promissory note, and Lew Austin's name was at the bottom of it.

"That's Lew's writing," hazarded Otis.

"It does seem like it," agreed Manchester.

"I say it's a forgery!" hotly cried Williamson.

"Slowly, slowly," persuasively spoke the judge. "It is not for us to decide on that. A court of law will settle it, if there is a dispute. Well, Mr. Jones, as I understand it, you claim that Austin died owing you this sum?"

"Yes."

"And about the horse Pontiac—"

"I claim him to wipe out my bill," interrupted Jones. "Austin owned two horses, but the other is a selling-plater that can't go a mile in a week. I want no part of him; I want Pontiac, and I am going to have him!" and with this he cast a belligerent look at John Williamson, as if hungry for a renewal of hostilities.

It was John who was cool now. He had recovered all of his wits, and he faced the claimant without perceptible emotion.

"There is a flaw in your title, Jonesy," he replied.

"There is no flaw."

"The horse was once Lew's property, but he is that no longer. I am the owner of Pontiac!"

"You?"

"Yes."

"Oh, come, now, that won't go down," Verplanck exclaimed, in apparent disgust.

"Why," mildly continued Manchester, "everybody knows that Lew Austin owned Pontiac."

"Everybody is not up with the times, then," retorted John. "I bought Pontiac and paid cash for him."

"He ran as Lew's horse."

"He was Lew's twenty-four hours ago, but he isn't now. After Lew had weighed in and left the track wholly I had a few minutes' talk with him, and I bought Pontiac then and there, at about six o'clock last night, to be precise. The gelding is mine!"

"That won't go down," declared Verplanck Jones.

"Do you doubt me?"

"Yes."

"Say, I have given my word on this—"

"Words don't go in law. Everybody knows that Pontiac was Lew Austin's nag, and it's clear that this is only a bluff on your part to try and stall me off. I shall take the horse."

Verplanck moved forward toward the door, but Williamson caught him by the shoulder and flung him back.

"Keep off! Nobody can touch that gelding. He's my property, and what I have I hold."

Judge Manchester was looking serious.

"John, can you prove that bargain of yours with Lew?"

"No. We were alone."

"Did you pay cash?"

"Yes."

"Where is your receipt?"

"I haven't any."

"You passed no papers?"

"No."

"And there is no proof of what you say?"

"Yes, there's my word," warmly replied Williamson.

"I'm afraid, John, that you will find it hard to prove your claim," the judge admitted, gravely.

"Prove it," sneered Jones. "Why, it's all bosh. Anybody can see through this. He's Lew's friend, and he thinks to bluff me off. He never bought the horse, and he never thought of claiming it until he heard of my claim. It's all a scheme to beat me out of my rights, but it won't work. I'll have that horse!"

Again he advanced: again John blocked his path.

"Mister Man," spoke the Oklahomaiter, "I don't know what claim you may have on Lew, but you've got none on that gelding. Pontiac is my property, and mine alone, and nobody else can have him. Keep back! If you try to enter this stable I'll knock you down!"

Verplanck Jones was a representative of the aristocracy of New York, and he wore clothes too English for good taste in an American, but he had courage and muscle, and he had taken numerous boxing lessons of a swell professor up Murray Hill way. Now, he was not reluctant to have a set-to with the bronzed man from the humble West.

To the last remark he warmly retorted:

"Try it, you loafer!"

He pressed forward, his hands partially raised, and the crisis quickly came. John spoke one more word of warning, but it was ignored, and then he thrust out his long arm, touching Verplanck's breast and pushing him back. Verplanck, enraged, struck out with what he meant should be a decisive blow, but it was warded off without difficulty by the stout Westerner.

Almost before the arm could drop John's lips parted again.

"If you will have a row, take it!"

Thump! Verplanck reeled back from a counter-stroke and fell to the ground.

A murmur rose from the crowd. Williamson had made good his threat, and his blow had been pretty to witness.

"That's the stuff!" cried Buck Coleman, appreciatively.

Verplanck was up quickly, but his zeal had been lessened perceptibly. He rubbed his nose as if expecting to find blood oozing out, but he was only shaken. The shock had been enough, so that he was not further ambitious to test the practicability of the teachings of the Murray Hill professor.

He looked at John with eyes that gleamed unpleasantly in his singularly white face.

"You struck me," he whispered.

"Something of the sort did happen," agreed Williamson, readily.

"It must be answered for."

"Suit yourself."

"Only one thing can wipe out this insult."

"Whisky!" suggested a wheezy voice from the background, and Dickey Spicer was seen smiling upon them, but the vagabond was frowned upon and then ignored.

"I am at your service," replied John, calmly. "A ring can be made here, and we can settle all grievances in quick order."

"Not that way. I choose the gentleman's way—not that of the rough."

"Oh, you don't take to fists as much as you did a moment ago, eh? Well, have it your own way. I can accommodate you in this, if not in the way of giving up my property to you."

"I challenge you to mortal combat," pursued Verplanck, vindictively.

"All right."

"The weapons, revolvers."

"It used to be the way that the challenged party had the choice of weapons, but we will waive that. Make it what you choose—revolvers, knives, rifles, cutlasses, boomerangs, David's sling—anything will suit me."

"The time," Verplanck went on, "tomorrow morning at daybreak, and the place as near here as possible."

"How nimbly you spin it off. One would almost say you had your lesson learned before you came. Now, Mr. Jones, I don't want to be mean, but, while you are taking all the details upon yourself, I beg that you will not refuse me one privilege—I would like to choose my own second, unless you have him picked out already."

"You are sarcastic, but all I want is prompt satisfaction."

"We will fight as promptly as you please, but I am not so sure you will be satisfied with the result."

"I'll hazard that."

"Gentlemen," interrupted Judge Manchester, "I am very much opposed to dueling, and I wish to see you both in private before more is done about this. I think we can bring about a reconciliation."

"Impossible," declared Verplanck.

"For my sentiments on the subject," grimly added Williamson, "I will refer you to Mr. V. Jones. He makes arrangements for me in all my duels."

John had the sympathy of the stable force with him, and this last sarcastic jest at his rival's expense brought forth a general laugh from them. It enraged Verplanck anew.

"You can sneer now," he cried, "but it will be different when I get you before my revolver. Then, when it is all over, I will have Pontiac."

"Mr. Man," cried John, aroused anew, "you never will have Pontiac."

"I say I shall."

Jones made a move as if to advance.

"Stop!" commanded Williamson, sharply. "If you try to enter that stable you are a dead man! I'll have no more nonsense. Keep off, or the revolver episode will come now. Be careful!"

"I've a mind to risk it!" muttered Verplanck, looking at his foe.

"Try it!"

"I believe I will."

"Try it," repeated John, in a ringing voice. "Try it, if you dare!"

CHAPTER XI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

Again Chase Manchester interfered.

"Young blood needs the restraining influence of old heads," he benignly asserted.

"We must not have any trouble here. Be sensible, both of you. Mr. Jones, I will remind you that if you claim Pontiac you must do it by process of law. Just because you have a claim against Lew Austin you cannot go into a stable and take his property—not to mention the property claimed by another gentleman. For the sake of argument let us admit that Lew's estate still owns Pontiac. Mind, I do not say it does—"

"Nor do I," grimly put in John Williamson.

"But if it does you'll have to go to law in due form. Get out your papers, if need be, but you can't seize the gelding off-hand."

"Not while I am here," snapped John.

"I mean lawfully."

"Nor otherwise," John commented.

"I'll go to law," decided Verplanck.

"Don't pay any retaining fee until after our duel," suggested John, whereupon the all-too-appreciative stable force laughed again.

"Now let us end this," advised Manchester. "I am sorry you boys have been so hot-headed and got into trouble, but I'll do what I can to further the cause of justice. I shall be busy with official duties around here for two hours—suppose we all meet at the stable two hours later?"

"That will suit me," replied Verplanck.

"And you, John?"

"Mr. Jones is acting for me," answered the Western man, with the former sarcasm. "Still, as he has promised only for himself, I'll add that I will be there. Now, gents, I'll go in and see Pontiac, the horse that I bought last night, and which I'll hold for the next ten years. Yes, I'll keep Pontiac until his teeth fall out."

There could be no misunderstanding this closing assertion, but Verplanck Jones did not see fit to pick up the gage of battle again. He turned and walked off slowly, leaving the field to his rival.

"He will be jest one mouthful fer you," Johnny," remarked a groom.

"Yes, but think of the taste," reminded Williamson.

"Why, it'll be Murray Hill violets and pinks."

"They grow only bogus plants up there," asserted a jockey.

"Are you really in earnest, John, in saying that you bought the gelding?" asked the judge.

"Yes."

"Pity you have no witness."

"Oh, I'll hold Pontiac all right."

"I hope so. Well, I'm off about my duties."

The stable force was left alone, and John entered and took a look at Pontiac. The horse looked well and acted well after his run of the previous day, and Williamson murmured:

"He is good for a pacemaker from post to wire many a time yet. No sign of a breakdown, and the ruck will not shake hands with him for years, I opine. Poor Lew! Why couldn't you be here to see it?"

"Say, that's a clean steal on Jones's part," declared Buck Coleman.

"A clean try, you mean. He hasn't got the horse yet."

"I hope he won't."

"Jonesy will be all out when the home stretch is reached."

"Do you mean to fight him?"

"Sure!"

"Do you know he is an expert marksman with the revolver?"

"No. Is he?"

"A noted crack."

"That will make it more pleasant."

"I'm afraid he will drop you."

"Don't worry, Buck. I don't. Will you act as my second?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Why, you don't want a plain stableman."

"I want Buck Coleman. Do you know him?"

"But I don't know anything about such things."

"You will when we are through with the sport. All you have to do is to load the revolvers, and then, when it's all over,

just tell Jonesy that I will harness up Pontiac and take him home to his mother."

Buck stared with open mouth. As Williamson spoke he was looking critically at one of Pontiac's hoofs, and he seemed to feel almost no interest in the duel. Such coolness was astonishing to Buck.

"These feet," added the man from Oklahoma, surveying Pontiac's hoofs thoughtfully, "are about perfect, and I reckon the best of care has been given them. Legs sound as a dollar, too. No need to fire them for splints, eh?"

"Not a bit," murmured Buck, absently, wondering what sort of a man it was who could think so much about horses' feet when he had a duel on hand.

"The gelding isn't a bit tucked up, either."

This flood of technical comment roused all of the trainer's professional zeal, and he came out of the realms of dueling and did his part in discussing Pontiac. No more was said about Verplanck Jones, and John went away somewhat later, without referring to it further. Buck looked after him wonderingly.

"Say, that Westerner is a corker," was his verdict.

Williamson was going to see Detective Crane, but on the way he encountered Dickey Spicer. The latter looked earnest and mysterious, and he remarked in a stage whisper:

"I want ter see you, boss."

"Here I am, Richard."

"It's about that duelin' biz."

"What duel? Oh, yes, I remember there is something of the sort on hand. What about it, Dickey?"

"Didn't I hear ye tell Jones that he seemed ter hev' his lesson all learned, as if he'd got it before he come?"

"I reckon I did say so."

"Boss, you've fell inter a trap!" declared Dickey.

"What trap?" asked John, interested.

"This was all put up between Jones an' Judge Manchester."

"Aren't you wild?"

"I heard them say so."

"When? Where? How?" tersely demanded John.

"I seen them down by the depot, when Jones come down here, this mornin'. The judge was waitin' fer Jones, an' Jones was surprised ter see him. Then they fixed it."

"Explain!"

"The judge took Jones aside very cautiously, so that nobody would see him do it—but, land o' love! he took him right where I was sleepin' in a box. He! he! I heard 'most all they said. The judge told Jones that Lew Austin was dead, an' said that ef he wanted ter save his money he would hev' ter be up an' doin', so he told him ter come here an' claim the hoss."

"Manchester did that?"

"He did, sure."

"Well, and then?"

"He told Jones that you would make a row, and that possibly the only way was to fight a duel with you. He reminded Jones that he was an expert shot, an' tol' him he wouldn't hev' no sort o' trouble in wingin' you, an' that it would give him satisfaction fer the way you insulted him—Jones—yesterday."

"Did Manchester say all that?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"That's a summary o' the whole biz'. Jones, he was hot for it, fer he said he was grievously insulted by you yesterday, so he fell right in with the judge's plan."

"So!" muttered John; "the worthy judge is using Jones to pull his chestnuts out of the fire—he's playing me and Jones against each other, by Jove!"

"Looks that way."

"I am not so hot against Jonesy as I was. If he's half-way decent I may only shoot him half dead. His worst offense is not dishonesty, but a lack of brains, and that was inherited, or cultivated through mistaken motives for social adornment."

"He parts his hair in the middle, though," suggested Dickey.

"Folks always do when their brains are feeble. It lets the water ooze out of the top."

John talked further with Dickey and learned all he could, after which he resumed his way toward where he expected to find the detective. He was not surprised at the latest developments. His opinion of Chase Manchester was fully formed, and this underhand attempt to get him killed in a duel by an expert revolver shot was more cowardly than unexpected.

"He wants to make away with me as effectually as he did with my poor father," thought the man from Oklahoma. "Well, the son has one advantage over the father, he is forewarned. Somehow, I don't feel that my funeral will be held before the judge's takes place."

The detective was found, but he had nothing new to tell.

"I can't as yet trace Lew Austin after he left the hotel," he admitted. "He went to see Judge Manchester, but he never reached there. Where he did go I can't say, but I intend to learn. It doesn't seem that he had any errand down on the beach—whom did he meet, and meet to his sorrow, when he wished only to see Judge Manchester?"

CHAPTER XII.

BEFORE THE DUEL.

There was no sign of suspicion in the detective's manner, and Williamson perceived that he had no doubt of the judge, so the man from Oklahoma was careful not to start an idea that was not yet ripe.

He made a non-committal reply, and then talked on the subject for some time in a general way, advancing nothing of importance except that he dilated on the fact that he had heard a cry of distress from the beach as he sat by the mansion window, and that Tommy Deegan and a companion had soon appeared from that quarter and gone toward the race-track.

He left this to sink into Crane's mind or be rejected, as the detective preferred.

The day brought no important developments. John was busy most of the time hunting with Crane for points concerning Lew Austin and apparently wholly forgetful of his own interests and dangers. After dinner he slept for three hours, for he had avowed his intention of again watching through the night by the body, and he came out of the sleep bright and resolute.

After supper he went to the piazza to enjoy a cigar, and Mabel Manchester joined him there. She looked anxious and downcast.

"I hear you are to fight a duel!" she remarked.

"Yes, I am," he answered, after a puff at the cigar.

"Why will you do such a horrible thing?"

"Horrible?"

"You may be killed."

"Oh! I shall not."

"John, I have been worrying terribly over this."

"Don't do it, my dear; don't do it. There's not a bit of need of it. Not an atom."

"They say Verplanck Jones is a dead shot."

"He may be one soon after our meeting, to-morrow morning," seriously replied John. "Yes, he may be a dead shot, or dead shooter, if you understand that better."

"And you—you!" exclaimed Mabel. "Everybody talks of his skill. He has made a business of this, and has pride in his skill, and has won many medals at aristocratic meetings."

"My girl, did you ever see me shoot when you were West?"

"Many times."

"What did you think of my style?"

"It was wonderful."

"Between you and me I can shoot the boots right off of Jonesy. Don't you worry: I'll eat him up at one mouthful."

"This is mere talk. I know your skill, but they all tell me of Mr. Jones's skill, too. Suppose you do kill him; he may also kill you."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's so," admitted

John. "Still, there will one of us come home from the picnic, and it's dollars to cents it will be me. I feel sorry for Jonesy, but I shall have to wing him."

"Oh! John, John, you are so reckless. Here is my father; I shall ask him to interfere."

"He will tell you that my honor demands that I meet Jonesy. I'm not that right, judge?"

Manchester had appeared on the piazza, and the last question was addressed to him. He was slow about answering. He went to a chair without saying a word, and then replied gravely:

"John, I don't know what to say. I am not at all in favor of dueling. It seems to be a wrong practice—"

"It is barbarous!" cried Mabel.

"Just my idea of it. Some people tell me I am old-fashioned and slow, but in old times dueling was more common in this section than now. They tell me, too, that it is all the rage in the West. I don't know as to that. It seems that you and Verplanck Jones are agreed as to its desirability here."

"Just so," calmly returned John. "In this case honor demands that we shoot at each other. It isn't likely either will be killed, and a month or two in bed is all we can reasonably hope for, but there will be a pile of fun for all of us."

"Fun!" echoed the judge.

"Yes."

"Is that what you call it?"

"Sure."

"Suppose a bullet does go to a vital part?"

"That would mean death."

Mabel gave a little scream of dismay.

"You take it coolly, John," muttered the judge, surprised.

"Why not? I don't see anything to get excited about."

"We can live but once."

"I feel a trifle worried about Jones, I'll admit. He is such a promising young man that it seems a pity to wing him. Do you think, judge, that if I decide to kill him outright, I could arrange it to take his body West for burial? Out in Oklahoma we like to add to our graveyard where we keep those who get wiped out that way. You see, we have a special cemetery for suicides and those who get killed in shooting matches. The suicides don't pan out in that law-abiding land, but our other collection is getting to be a noble one in numbers. If I could be assured that I could take Jones out there for burial I should shoot a good deal closer, I reckon."

Chase Manchester looked horrified.

"Surely, you are jesting!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all."

"The suggestion is barbarous."

"Why?"

"It is so horribly cold blooded."

"I dare say you think it criminal to kill a man?"

"I certainly do."

"No wonder that this is called the 'effete East!'" murmured John.

Chase Manchester moved uneasily in his chair. He had before known that his daughter's chosen husband was a very breezy sort of a person, but this was the first sign of a nature like that now revealed. The revelation did not appear to put him into a comfortable frame of mind, and his usual benign flow of language was lacking.

Mabel had been dumfounded by the turn of the conversation, but when she rallied she besought her lover to give up the duel. John declined kindly, but firmly.

"Jones and I have arranged it all, and he has to come all the way down from New York, or stop over here. It will put him to extra expense, and probably take him out of bed earlier than usual. It would be positively mean to disappoint him. I never break an engagement."

Judge Manchester looked at the man who was advancing these remarkable views, and the gentleman who could assist to decide an important horse-race without a tremor of nerves now seemed bewildered and upset.

"Have a cigar," added Williamson.

"This is one of a new brand I bought at

the hotel. If you don't want it to-night, save it for the shooting-bee in the morning."

"Well, well!" murmured Chase.

"Eh?"

"You will take the cake?"

"I don't clearly understand—"

"Are you made of iron?"

John sent a wreath of smoke upward.

"Ship armor, Harveyized!" he calmly replied.

The comparison did not seem inapt, and Manchester mentally admitted the fact. He began to understand his prospective son-in-law better, and the new revelations gave him more respect of a certain kind, if not more satisfaction.

Presently Mabel, finding her lover was not to be turned from his purpose, advanced another idea.

"If you will fight the duel," she said, "you must give up making the night-watch by Mr. Austin's body. Loss of sleep will upset your nerve and make you unfit for the delicate task of shooting."

"Not at all," replied John. "I shall be much calmer and more buoyant of spirit than if I indulged in profound sleep. Don't you think so, judge?"

"I should say you were right," answered Manchester.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mabel.

"The judge and I think so."

"Father," added Mabel, "you surely cannot say that. You always have commented on plenty of sleep as necessary to the accomplishment of work of any severe task."

Manchester looked uneasy.

"This is different," he hastily explained.

"As John says, too much sleep makes one languid, oftentimes, and to wake and suddenly remember such a thing as a duel might shake the nerves. Am I right in this assumption, John?"

"Quite right, sir."

Williamson could hardly restrain himself from promptly denouncing the man who had so quickly fallen into his trap and exposed his hand, and who was more than willing to do all he could to unfit him for the duel. The Westerner understood his sweetheart's father well.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REVOLVER SHOT.

In due time Williamson went to his night's vigil. All arrangements had been made for the duel in the morning. Judge Manchester and Otis were to be present as supernumeraries—John had not asked them to act as his seconds, and they could not very well appear as aids to Verplanck Jones.

Some precautions had been taken to prevent interference on the part of the authorities, but it was thought that, in the rush of interest in Lew Austin's case, they might not hear of the matter at all, despite the publicity given it by the trouble at the stable.

John Williamson was the calmest person who did know of it, and he took his place in the room where the body lay with all the unconcern imaginable.

When alone he looked around the room.

"Again in the place where I believe my father died," he murmured. "The trail seems rather blind, with so many years to cover it, but I have taken it up and shall carry it forward. I shall—I must succeed. My father shall be avenged."

He sat down and thought of the past.

Upward of twenty years before Exol Williamson, his wife and son John had been in New York City. The father found it hard to make a living; they were very poor, and when new disasters came to them the parents agreed that it would be best for Mrs. Williamson and the boy to go for a while to her old Western home.

They went, and Exol continued the battle alone, but not without remembering them. He wrote often, and sent them small sums of money—enough to pay their daily bills. He did not confess it, but Mrs. Williamson well knew he was in hard straits, herself. His address was all the while "General Delivery," and she suspected from that that he was living more humbly than he would permit her to see.

Presently the tenor of his letters changed. He always had been of an inventive nature, and given to drawings, models and plans of patents that had come to nothing.

Suddenly he began to refer to such things again, and he kept it up for several months. He spoke of a patron who would help him if his plans came to anything, and grew more and more hopeful in form of expression. He even spoke of being rich soon, and he never had been wanting in what was practical.

Suddenly his letters stopped. Silence fell around him. He never wrote again.

Mrs. Williamson corresponded with the Superintendent of the New York Police, but it was long ere she learned anything. Then she was told that Exol Williamson was dead, drowned, and his body, long lifeless, was sent to her.

She never accepted the result with composure. The New York authorities did not hint at violence, and would not agree that such a thing might be when she suggested it, but she persisted in declaring that her husband had been murdered.

She tried to learn more, but she was very poor, and she lacked means of pressing the case. People in both her Western home and New York advised her to accept the theory of accidental drowning, but she lived and died with her belief unshaken that her husband had met with foul play. Mention of all the details of the case would here consume much space, but she had some grounds for thinking so. Her womanly love supplied the rest.

Poor, rendered ill by the worry and without friends who could aid her, she had let it drop.

John had then been ten years old. When he was sixteen he came to New York alone and tried to get more light, but he failed. He had gone back hopeless, but his mother's belief was in his mind—he believed his father had died by violence.

Now, he was once more on the ground, and the trail did not look so mysterious.

Thinking of all this now he muttered:

"I am the guest of my father's slayer. Strange fact! Most wonderful turn of fate's wheel! And now the wretch would have me killed by Verplanck Jones. We will see if he succeeds. He has made a fool of Jones, but he will not make a victim of me!"

The Westerner had come on this occasion prepared to take away the rest of Exol Williamson's belongings, and he rose to go to the niche. He passed across the first half of the floor, and then stopped as the clock struck two.

"The night wears on," he thought. "The duel comes at daybreak, and Peter Green will soon be here to relieve me. I will—"

Crack!—zip!

Williamson started. A revolver had sounded, and the bullet had whizzed past his ear. It was a close call, but the shot was harmless; the lead struck the opposite wall and imbedded itself, leaving the gash in the woodwork.

Then it might have been seen what training on the Western plains and mountains had done for John Williamson. His hand flashed to his pocket, and, at the same moment, he wheeled quickly. He came to about face with the revolver ready for work and his keen eyes fixed ahead.

The windows were open; the shot had come that way.

Nobody was to be seen, however.

It was no surprise to the man from Oklahoma, but if he was not further menaced he was not disposed to stand and let himself be a target further. All this had been nearly instantaneous, and in a moment more he would have bounded forward, but now something really unexpected occurred.

With one motion a man appeared at the opening, shot forward and then fell in a heap on the floor.

He seemed to come without any method, and when he was once down he simply sprawled and made ineffectual efforts to rise. Then a voice rose from the window.

"Keep yer eye on him, Johnny; I'm comin'!"

Again Williamson looked at the window. Dickey Spicer was there, cheerful and at ease. But Dickey was bound for another section, and tumbled into the room with as little grace as his predecessor, though he did land on his feet.

"Hang ter yer gun, Johnny!" he added. "Shoot the p'ison snake ef he gits his head up fer a bite."

The first intruder regained his feet. John did not wholly understand the situation, but he knew enough when he recognized the man to make his face grow sterner than before.

It was Tommy Deegan, the tout.

"Well," cried Williamson, "what are you doing here?"

Tommy seemed to struggle with some obstacle in his throat, and he stammered and choked a good deal before he found speech.

"I—I don't know," he finally muttered.

"It was a mistake—"

"A mighty big mistake," agreed John.

"I didn't want ter come in."

"No, but I jest h'isted him!" cheerfully added Dickey.

"Why?" snapped John.

"I thought you would want ter see the gent who shot at ye."

"There he is!" exclaimed Tommy, pointing at Dickey.

"Oh! muzzle yer ticker!" muttered the tramp, in disgust, and he ran out his tongue and tapped it with his finger as if to show what a "ticker" was.

Tommy had been looking about as if calculating the chances of a rush for the window, but John suddenly moved forward. He gained the tout's side and laid hold of his arm.

"Why have you tried to kill me?" he demanded.

"I? I try? Why, I didn't. It was that tramp there."

"Dickey, how is it?" asked John.

"He blazed away at ye, an' I jest picked him up and fired him in so ye could see who did it."

"That's a lie!" declared the tout.

"The case shows for itself," asserted John.

"Not much it don't!" cried Tommy, recovering his badly-scattered wits. "It don't show fer nothin' ef you believe that dirty scarecrow. You see, Mr. Williamson, I come along this way an' seen this duck by the winder with his gun drawn an' a bead on. See? I ketched onter the fact that he was up ter mischief, so I crept up ter him an' tried ter stop it. I did manage to spoil his aim, but not to stop the shot. Then we grappled, an' he was so strong he flung me inter the crib. D'at's dead straight, too. See?"

Dickey promptly produced his old almanac.

"When was it?" he asked.

"When was what?" growled Tommy.

"That a law was passed that a fool couldn't be hung fer lyin'."

"Say, you duck, you're a pretty stuff ter insult a gent, you be! Go an' git a wash!"

"I do need it, after havin' touched you," admitted unabashed Dickey.

"Say, do ye know who you're talkin' to?" shouted the tout.

"A professional beauty, with pimples all over his face."

"Let up, or I'll smash yer jaw. See?"

The tout doubled up a big fist, but John was tired of this Bowery bluff on Deegan's part, if not of Dickey's banter.

"Stop!" he ordered. "No quarreling here. It seems that there is a question of veracity between you two. Now, I will test you in my own way, and the man adjudged guilty of lying I shall shoot right here and now. Observe?" and Williamson tapped his revolver meaningly.

"That's fair," declared Tommy.

"You are ready for the test?"

"Sure!"

"And you, Dickey?"

"I'm ready for anything reasonable—tests, rest, sleep, eatin' or drinkin'—ready fer anything but work," replied Dickey.

"The test shall be applied. Gentlemen,

do you see what is on the table yonder?"

The speaker looked only at Tommy Deegan as he asked the question. Thus far Thomas had been sedulously engaged in trying to clear his reputation, and as he was really in hot water, he had not had time to look around him. Now John's finger directed his gaze, and he centered his regard on what was there.

He gave a start. It was not one of surprise; all of the settlement knew what that room held, but there was a rush of something uncomfortable in his manner.

"Look!" added Williamson.

"I—I see," replied Thomas.

"Notice that unsightly object, so full of suggestive curves and angles; so suggestive of things we all fear. Do you know what it is?"

"It's the—the—the—"

Tommy stammered and lost his voice.

"The body of dead, murdered Lew Austin!" solemnly continued John. "Now, I've heard it said that if a man tells a lie when looking at a corpse the dead man will rise and speak to him. Gentlemen, the test is this, and you must both go and touch the dead jockey, and with such a contact protest your innocence. Go to the body!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TOUT'S ORDEAL.

The direction was not severely given, though it had a solemnity that was impressive, and there was nothing in its mere words to make anybody feel uncomfortable. Dickey Spicer did not feel uncomfortable, and with a grin on his face he was about to start forward, when a secret motion from John Williamson checked him.

Tommy Deegan did not hasten forward. Instead, he stood still and looked at the cloth-covered object on the table. Tommy's face was covered with sudden perspiration. Possibly he was warm. Tommy's face was white. Possibly he did not feel just well.

"Mr. Deegan," pursued John, "you are nearest. Go ahead!"

The tout started.

"What?" he blankly gasped.

"Come here."

Williamson went nearer the body and laid his hand on the cloth.

"Poor Lew lies here," he added. "Come and look at him."

"Hang it, I don't like to look at a dead man," exclaimed Tommy.

"But this is to prove whether you or Dickey Spicer tried to shoot me. It is nothing to look at the corpse. Unless the tradition be true that a dead man will rise to speak to a liar, you need not either of you fear poor Lew. Here he lies, still in death—dead by a murderer's hand. It's a sad end to a merry life. You know what Lew was—he was good and noble, and we are benefited by being near his body. Come, let each of us dip a finger in his blood—it will do us good, for he was grand and noble. Come and touch his blood!"

Tommy clawed wildly at his hair, as if to remove some obstruction from his suffering brain. John's words affected him unpleasantly.

"Say, what do I care about this?" he asked, weakly.

"You say Dickey fired the shot."

"The tramp did it."

"Prove your own innocence by my test."

"But, hang it all, I don't like dead men—"

"Are you afraid of Lew Austin?"

"Afraid? No! Bosh! of course I'm not."

"Come!"

The tout felt that he was getting into an unpleasant situation, and he braced himself and determined to risk a look. Whether his aversion to it had been correctly stated was something he knew best, but it was not an unusual aversion, if true.

Making a bold push, he hastened forward.

"Lift up ye'r cover," he flippantly directed.

John flung the cloth back.

"Look!" he commanded solemnly. "Look at murdered Lew!"

Tommy saw, and the mutilated face of the dead man was certainly enough to upset his courage. He was ghastly pale. His teeth actually chattered. His eyes seemed about to shoot out of his head.

"A human being," continued John, deeply, "and dead by a murderer's hand. How does the murderer feel now, think you?"

The tout's lips moved, but he enunciated nothing.

"Touch him!" directed Williamson.

Tommy started back.

"Touch him? No, I won't!" he exclaimed.

"Are you afraid?"

"Of what?"

"Lew."

"Bah! Why should I be?"

"I don't know why," replied the Westerner. "A dead man is a peculiar thing. Where I come from we know singular things about the dead. We believe if the murderer sees his victim, and dares to turn away, the dead will come back to life long enough to touch him. Old miners assure me that it is no fable, but honest fact. If I had killed Lew I should not dare turn away after looking at him. I should expect him to throw out his hand and seize me—thus!"

Rigor mortis had departed from the corpse, and the man from Oklahoma, playing a novel and bold game, suddenly grasped one of the lifeless hands and swung it around toward Tommy Deegan. The hand struck the tout full in the breast and then fell a little down so that one of its fingers seemed to point to him strangely.

It was more than Tommy could stand. He uttered a yell, wheeled, and ran toward the window, and, avoiding Dickey's attempt to stay him, leaped out of the window.

One moment he was to be seen; the next he was gone, and they heard his steps as he bounded away.

"Shall I chase him?" demanded Dickey, eagerly.

"No. Let him go."

Answering tersely, John recovered the silent member of the party, and then turned to the tramp with a half-smile.

"Thomas did not stand the test," he added.

"Oh, it was him who tried to shoot ye."

"Of course."

"I was watchin' of him, but I didn't expect no sech game as shootin', an' I wasn't soon enough when I tumbled ter his purpose. Immediately after I was onter his neck, an' I jest flung him in."

"Simple enough. Why did he seek to kill me?"

"Boss, he was one of the men you seen comin' up from the beach jest after you heard the cry from there, the night that Lew was killed."

"Suggestively put. What more? Why was he so afraid of this harmless clay?"

"I foller ye, boss. You think he killed Lew."

"Frankly, it looks to me as if he might have had a hand in it. That's why I went on as I did. I wanted to see if he could stand sight of the clay, after a little talk before the sight."

"You scared him silly. He's guilty. Nobody but a guilty man would 'a' been so scared."

"That is not sure. Some very worthy people have a deep aversion to the sight of the dead. In this case, however, I count nothing on that. Tommy has no fineness of feeling, but this does not count."

"We've scared him blue."

"Likewise, we have added to our suspicions and aroused his. He will be on his guard. Maybe I have done unwisely, but it is done."

"He, he! I shouldn't wonder ef he was runnin' yet. Tommy ain't no 'postle o' rest, not jest now. He won't grow no brain while he's cantering off like that."

Williamson did not answer. He began to pace the room with a serious expression on his face. He had allowed Tommy to go, but it did not change the aspect of the case. His life had been attempted. Why?

Deegan might be a rascal, but he would hardly take such a step out of mere wantonness. There never had been trouble

between him and the man from Oklahoma. Then, why should he try to kill John?

"Does Judge Manchester fear that the duel will not go as he wishes?" mused the young man. "Has he resorted to another way of getting rid of me? I believe I know just why Tommy Deegan fired the shot."

His suspicions were not communicated to Dickey, and when John again addressed his companion it was on different matters.

Dickey had no more to tell, and his highest ambition seemed to be to lie down and rest, but Williamson did not give him much time there. He did not want the tramp known as his ally, and he soon hustled him off. Then he waited for the coming of Peter Green as a relief.

When he left the house he carried a bundle with him. It contained all that remained of the effects he had found in the recess in the wall. With this package he took his way to the stable where Pontiac was kept.

He found Buck Coleman just getting ready to go to the dueling ground.

"Got your weapons there?" asked the trainer.

"Something else. Buck, I have been thinking. Do you know a safe stable in New York?"

"Private?"

"Any sort, if a horse can be kept there in safety."

"A friend of mine has a small livery stable down in the Thirteenth Ward that is nice and cosy."

"Is he an honest man?"

"Honest as the hills of Jersey."

"Then I want him to take charge of Pontiac."

"What? Of Pontiac? Why?"

"Verplanck Jones's attempt to get the gelding isn't over by a long shot. I can't conscientiously kill Jones this morning, for this is a law-abiding land, and, besides, Jones isn't so much to blame for the duel as some other people. Result, he will make another trial to get Pontiac."

"I reckon he will."

"This time he will have legal papers, and will seek to seize him with the help of an officer. If he does that I have got to fight the thing out in court, and I am afraid I might get whipped, though I am the rightful owner of the horse."

"So you will take him to New York?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This morning."

"The dickens! You move promptly."

"Verplanck Jones stopped down here last night. Along with him was a man he introduced to some as the man who was to act as his second. It is dollars to dimes that the man was an officer. I believe a different man will show up as the second, and while Jones and I are peeping each other the stranger will slide around here with his legal papers and seize the horse."

"Ha! that would be a sharp move on their part."

"We will be sharper. When the boat goes to New York, just after the duel, you and I will go on her—and so will Pontiac."

"Capital plan. But what will the supposed officer be doing in the meanwhile?"

"Vainly hunting. Pontiac must be sent to the boat right away. Get your best groom and send him off with the gelding. Stay. You have time to go to the boat yourself, and then get around to the dueling ground. Do it! Hustle Pontiac to the boat, and then leave him in charge of the groom. Then, when the duel is over, you and I will go to New York with the horse."

"It shall be done immediately. I will—But we are forgetting one thing."

"What?"

"Suppose that—that— Well, you see you may—"

"Be killed in the duel?"

"Yes."

"I shall not. Don't fear for me. Will you get the horse down?"

"Yes."

"Take this package along and see that it is safely placed on the boat before you leave."

"I'll do it."

"I'm off now. I have just time to go to Manchester's and shave before the duel."

With this cool remark the man from Oklahoma walked away.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THEY FOUGHT.

Williamson had no intention of wasting any time in shaving, and when he reached the judge's house and entered his own room he proceeded first to put the rest of the papers secured from the niche of the old building into his pocket. Next, he took out his revolver and loaded it to his taste.

"I hope Jones will be prompt," he murmured. "I want this over."

His next step was to take a slip of note-paper and write a few words on it. He had been brief and to the point:

"The ways of the effete East are not the ways of the bounding West. I may find it necessary to dodge the officers after this duel, so I am going away for a short time. Can't say when I shall return."

He left this in a prominent position and then went down-stairs. He had timed himself so well that Judge Manchester and Otis were just ready. Both looked serious.

"Good-morning, John," spoke the elder man.

"Hallo, judge, is that you?" coolly replied the duelist.

"Yes. How are you feeling?"

"Fine. It's a bracing morning."

"John, I have been thinking. I wonder if this can't be patched up? If you and Jones should make up—"

"If we should it would surprise me. Jones and I are implacable. Don't mention it."

But Manchester did dwell on the subject, picturing the horrors of dueling, but he made no impression. John seemed quite as inexorable as his speech indicated, and the judge sighed and dropped the subject. They went to the ground selected for the fight, being joined on the way by Buck Coleman. The Manchesters looked askance at the trainer, and it was clear that the judge felt that his son should be in Buck's place, but it was too late to undo matters.

Five minutes after their arrival Verplanck Jones and his party put in an appearance. As John had suspected, the official-looking person was not there. The Westerner whispered to Buck.

"How about Pontiac?"

"Safe on the boat, with a good man in charge."

"Then the trouble is all over."

Jones had a man of his own rank along with him—a young fellow who tried to look very dignified, and was disagreeably curt toward the humble second of his principal's opponent.

It had been arranged that each man should furnish his own revolver, some stipulations having been made as to length and size of bore. Neither party found anything to complain of in this respect.

Everybody dallied a little.

"Come, gentlemen," urged John, "get in motion. The survivor does not want to lose his breakfast."

"You will be less troubled later on," retorted Jones, and less in haste."

"On the contrary," replied John, "the bulk of my hurrying will then be done. Gentlemen, pace off the ground and not keep things in the doldrums. The sun will soon be up. Don't let it beat us out."

His suggestion put them in motion once more, and the seconds managed to pace off the ground without trouble. Then all was ready for the duel. Manchester approached Williamson with a preternaturally serious expression. He put out his hand and spoke almost sepulchraly:

"John, have you any message for Ma-bel?"

"I'll give it to her myself," calmly replied the Westerner.

"But you may fall."

"No danger."

"This is serious business."

"I do rather feel for Jones."

"But your own case—"

"Is different."

"Pardon me, but if you should be fatally shot there must be some message you would send to those you love, and will see

no more. I, of course, would tell them how you died, but there must be something you would say to them yourself."

Williamson could very cheerfully have flogged his prospective father-in-law then and there. He plainly perceived that it was the judge's intention to upset his nerves, and thus render him an easy victim to Jones, but it was lost effort.

"There is something in that," he admitted, gravely.

"A farewell message—"

"True, true! Tell them," added John, "that I don't believe the moon is made of green cheese!"

With this extraordinary farewell message he walked briskly over to the seconds.

"Come, come, Buck," he complained, "the stable boy said that the bay horse St. Abrams needed seeing to by you at once, and here you are wasting your time. Get a move on."

Even Verplanck Jones stared in amazement at the remarkable man who could think more of horses and stable boys than of himself in such a crisis, and Chase Manchester, who had been left bewildered by the strange closing words to him, now muttered:

"This fellow is of iron, or he's a trifle light-headed."

Buck had never heard of the horse St. Abrams, and he knew nothing about any stable boy who wanted him back there, but he hustled around obediently. The principals were duly placed.

The signal was to be the firing of a revolver by a chosen man, and this man was the doctor brought along for the occasion. He now took charge. He held up a bright pistol.

"Ready, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Ready!" sharply replied Verplanck.

"Drive on, doc," added the cool man from Oklahoma.

The doctor raised his free hand.

Bang! He had pulled the trigger.

Bang! Bang!

Two other shots followed, but not in unison. They were, in fact, widely separated. It was Verplanck who fired last, and Buck noticed that he held his revolver pointed, not at Williamson, but almost up in the air. With almost the same motion he tumbled to the ground.

"Killed!" cried Judge Manchester, sharply.

"Not at all," serenely broke in the voice of John Williamson. "If you look closely you will find a bullet hole through his arm about five inches below the elbow, though why that should make him fall I don't know. Don't be alarmed, gentlemen; Jones is not seriously injured. There will be but little flow of blood, and no need of his remaining indoors this trying summer weather. Of course the duel is off. But it has been a harmless little diversion anyhow. Jones's arm is in hospital for a few days, for I've touched a few minor cords in it, but he will live to comfort his parents in their old age many a day yet."

Utterly unconcerned, the successful duelist talked on, while Chase Manchester, turning several different colors in succession, waited to get a word with him.

"John, John!" he cried, "are you hurt?"

"Hurt? Why, bless you, no. There hasn't been anything to hurt me, judge."

"Verplanck fired—"

"Too late. He may be able to take part in the Chappie Gun Club; and win divers prizes shooting at clay pigeons, but he wasn't built for a cowboy or miner. If you noticed, judge, he was just a tenth part of a second behind me in pulling trigger—that was enough to put him out of it. Jonesy is a fine chap, but he can't shoot for a cent. If I had been vicious I could have bored him so full of holes that he wouldn't have cast a shadow after sun-up, but I couldn't take advantage of his ignorance."

Manchester rubbed his head confusedly.

"Well, well, well," he muttered, and had no more to say.

Verplanck Jones had been lifted partially up by his second and the doctor, and it was already known that he was not badly injured. He had been wounded in the precise spot and in the precise degree mentioned by Williamson. His right arm had a gash below the elbow, and though there

was but little flow of blood and no disabling hurt, he would not be able to hold a revolver for some days to come.

When Chase Manchester knew this he was simply amazed.

"That Williamson is a dead shot!" the judge whispered to his son.

The wound was soon bound up, and Jones was on his feet. He stood without difficulty, and, though pale, was not in shape to worry his second. The doctor then had something to say.

"Now, gentlemen," he advised, "just step up and shake hands. You know it's the time-honored practice."

"We will improve upon it," replied John, calmly. "Instead of such fol-de-rol as that let each of us promise, to himself—no need of loud talk—to do the right thing in the future. That will be better than bumping our knuckles together. Buck, are you ready to go?"

"Yes," answered the trainer.

"Come on!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Manchester. "We will all go together."

"We can meet later on. I am in haste now. So long!"

With this unceremonious farewell the man from Oklahoma walked rapidly away with Buck at his heels.

"You did him up brown," cried honest Buck.

"It was nothing. I had it all my own way. I knew I could do it. I can shoot straight, and I can shoot far quicker than he. A walk-over!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD HOUSE IN NEW YORK.

Buck had more to say, for he was both excited and delighted. Always favorably impressed with John Williamson, he was now very proud of him, and he could not say too much.

Without either man mentioning their proper course, they had taken the way to the boat. As they passed a certain point they had a view of the vicinity of the race-course, and just there they saw a man standing with his hands in his pockets and a pose that suggested uncertainty of mind.

"Say," cried Buck, "there's that feller you thought was an officer."

"Just so," responded John. "He has been to the stable to slap his official papers onto old Pontiac, and he don't know what to make of the disappearance of the racer. We do know. He's outwitted. Hustle a bit, Buck!"

There was nothing to prevent the accomplishment of their purpose. They reached the boat in safety, and just about in time, too. Ten minutes later they were bound for New York with Pontiac aboard, and the opposition was decidedly beaten at all points.

The trip was successfully made, and at the schedule time they landed in the city. Pontiac was taken ashore and led to the stable in the Thirteenth Ward. As luck would have it Buck's friend, the keeper, had a vacant stall, and arrangements were soon made to have Pontiac accommodated.

The name of the liveryman was Andy Dickman. He was a plain, practical man, and John liked his looks. He talked with him until fully satisfied. Of course it was necessary to confide in him to a certain degree, and though he was not told of the circumstances, he was informed that Pontiac must be kept from public view. Outsiders must not see him, and nobody but Buck or John was to take him away under any condition.

All this was faithfully promised.

When business was settled, Andy had time to speak more with Buck on personal matters.

"Still training horses, I suppose?" he asked.

"Same old story, Andy."

"Down at the track?"

"Yes."

"I run down now and then. They have had some hot races this year, and some mighty good horses are in it. Ramapo, Domino, Henry of Navarre and Dobbins are jewels."

"All of that?"

"What satisfaction does Chase Manchester give as a judge of the races?"

"Good!"

"I wouldn't trust the old fellow."

"Do you know him?" broke in Williamson.

"Well, I ought to. I worked for him for five years. Say, look over yonder, will you? See that old building where a sign announces that it is a travelers' rest, and that lodgings can be obtained for ten cents?"

"Yes."

"They call it a hotel, but you can guess the grade of it when you scan their prices. It is a wreck now, and every old brick looks as if time had felt a grudge against it for many years—one of the fossils of the ward. Yet, it was once decent, and there Chase Manchester lived for years."

"Is that so?" exclaimed John.

"Yes, and I worked for him then."

"When did he live there?"

"Something like twenty years ago."

John had grown decidedly interested.

"Then the judge hasn't always lived down by the track?" he asked, constructing his question to lead Andy on.

"He lived in the Thirteenth Ward many years, and right in that house yonder. Then he moved down where he lives now."

"You worked for him here?"

"Yes, and down there. I went with him when he moved, and so did the other servants he had—two or three in all—but we didn't any of us hang out long with him after. He was rather decent when he was in New York, but he got to be a crank curmudgeon down there. Maybe his money did it, for he got rich about that time."

"Mr. Dickman, I would like to talk with you more about this."

"You can all you wish. Come right into the office, and we can sit there and chat all you please. My men can attend to the work that is going now."

"If you don't mind," interrupted Buck, looking at John, "I will run down to see my sister while you visit Andy."

This just suited the man from Oklahoma, and he bade Buck go. The horse trainer departed, and John and Andy went alone to the office.

Williamson kept his usual composure, but he was deeply interested and would not have parted from his new acquaintance for a good deal. Andy was pleasant and agreeable, and he placed a chair and saw his guest comfortably seated.

"Some men," he observed, smiling, "would not confess to having worked as a servant once, but I don't mind. I began life on nothing but muscle and a willingness to work, and I was young when I served Chase Manchester."

"He was not old then?"

"No, nor especially young. He was just married when I went with him, though he was all of thirty-five then. He had a rather decent wife—she died soon, after they went down below—and two children were born while I was in the family, up here, Otis and Mabel."

"The judge was not rich then?"

"He had pretty hard pulling to get a living, though he kept up a show of style."

"What was his business?"

"Lawyer. They say he tried practicing at the bar and made a big fizzle. He fell back on getting patents, and that was his calling when I knew him."

"Patent lawyer, eh?"

"Yes."

"How did he get his money?"

"On a patent of his own. Something about the making of writing papers. He improved the art so that a better article could be made at less expense. It was a big hit."

"Was he studying up patents of his own when you knew him?"

"I never knew of his doing it. Really, it was a good deal of a surprise to me when I heard he had patented anything. He makes quite a spread now, with his money and his position in the racing business; but he really has no business head, or ability, or ingenuity. They say he

used to botch many of his clients' undertakings, through lack of mechanical gifts of his own."

"Still, he got his paying patent out?"

"Yes; mighty queer."

John did not think so. He remembered his father's drawings, and his father's note in which he expressly stated he had just finished his improved appliance for the making of writing papers.

"Manchester had no family but his wife and two children, had he?"

"No."

"No relatives living with him?"

"No."

"You mentioned his clients. Did you ever see any of them?"

"Occasionally."

"I suppose they did not live with him—but of course not."

"Wrong! One of them did live with him for some months, and went with him to the lower country. It was said that he was being helped by Manchester; that the judge gave him his keep for a share in some invention he was trying to perfect."

"This man—what did you say his name was?"

"I didn't say. It was—the name evades me now. Rather an unusual name, I believe. Something like Extra, or Excellent—I have it! Exol Williamson!"

"Ah!"

"Say! Your name is Williamson, too. Are you—"

"Are you sure it was Williamson?"

"Yes. Was he—"

Andy was trying to ask if he was a relative, but John calmly, and it seemed innocently, bluffed him off.

"That's the first time I ever knew of a Williamson who was a genius. Tell me about my namesake. Did you see him often?"

"Why, every day for months. He was a fine fellow, too; I liked him well. He had a room in that house I have pointed out, and there he toiled like a slave."

"Doing what?"

"At work on a patent."

"Patent of what?"

"None of us ever knew—none of the servants. I mean. Nobody could have been more agreeable, sociable and pleasant than Exol Williamson, and he was frank on all subjects but his patent. He told me plainly that he and the judge were to be the only ones to know what that was until it was all completed."

"Did you see nothing by which to make a guess?"

"No. Mr. Williamson was very shy about it. But he was a fine fellow, all the same, though he was poor. He often talked to me of his hopes and plans. He had a wife and boy out in Iowa, or Kansas, or some Western state. He was all bound up in them, and it was a tremendous affection, too."

John's lip quivered. This recital moved him deeply.

"And then?" he asked, in a low voice. "What became of this poverty-stricken inventor?"

"When we moved to the lower country he went with us, and he had a room in the judge's house there, same as he had done here. He stayed some months down there."

"Did he succeed with his patent?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"He told me, one afternoon, that he had succeeded. He was very happy, and said he would soon have his wife and child with him, for the patent would make him a rich man."

"What next?"

"Right here the story comes to a full stop. He left the house the next morning, before even the servants were up, and took a boat or train for New York. I never saw him afterward."

"Nor heard from him?"

"Not direct. The judge told us he had succeeded fully, and had scooped in a fortune. I don't know how it was. To tell the truth, I was a little miffed over the matter. He gave me credit for being kind and helpful to him, and promised me financial reward; and though I liked

him too well to feel hard toward him, I was disappointed because he left without even saying good-by to me."

"Where did he go?" demanded John, sharply. "Did he go dead or alive?"

CHAPTER XVII.

A RISKY VENTURE.

The stableman looked up with a start.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"You say," replied Williamson, "that the inventor went at a very early hour, before even the servants were up, and without saying he was going. Isn't that odd?"

"Well, it may be," Andy admitted, "though I never had thought of putting any tragic construction on it. But, now I think of it, he couldn't have met with foul play, for Judge Manchester testified that he continued to operate his invention."

"Who else said so?"

"Nobody, to my knowledge."

"Mr. Dickman, are you a friend of Chase Manchester's?"

"I don't love him a bit!" declared Andy.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Sure!"

"You noticed that my surname was the same as that of the lost inventor. There is good reason for that. Exol Williamson was my father."

"Thunder!"

"I am the boy who was in the Western state, and whom he often mentioned. I am his son."

Andy suddenly reached out his hand and grasped that of his companion.

"I should have known it," he replied, quickly. "When I first saw you I knew there was something familiar in your looks, but I couldn't place the likeness. I see it plainly now. You are a larger man than your father, but you are wonderfully like Exol Williamson."

"You will now understand why I am interested in him."

"So I do. But, say, why do you ask such peculiar questions about him?" suddenly demanded Andy. "If he made a fortune out of his invention you ought to know it."

"No such fortune was made, and it seems that Manchester lied to you direct."

"He surely told me that Exol Williamson made a fortune, as I say."

"How long was this after my father left the judge's?"

"It was mentioned several times in the year that followed."

"Andy, my father was then a dead man."

"Great heavens! You don't mean it?"

"More; I believe he was murdered."

"Who by?"

"Who, unless it was the man who so suddenly grew rich on the heels of his disappearance?"

"Chase Manchester!"

"Andy, I am trusting a good deal in you. You look like an honest man, and you say Exol Williamson was kind to you. At present my ends demand utter silence on this subject, and you can ruin me by betraying me to Manchester or by speaking rashly to outsiders."

"My boy, I won't do either!" exclaimed Andy. "I'll give you the same loyalty I gave to Exol Williamson, and not a word will I breathe without your permission."

"I believe you. What more can you tell? You know I doubt the judge. Can you add to my information, for or against him?"

"I don't think of anything."

"The old house. Who keeps it now?"

"A certain Bob Travor. It has been a so-called hotel ever since Manchester gave it up, though the prices were at first double what they are now. Its first keeper, after it became a lodging house, was a fellow named Tommy Deegan, who was very thick at that time with Chase Manchester, though what they had in common I don't know."

"Tommy Deegan, eh?"

"Yes. He petered out, for he knew nothing about keeping a lodging house, and the judge sold the place and Tommy had to quit."

"He was the first to hire it of the judge, eh?"

"He was the first to occupy it after the judge left. I can't say whether he hired it or not. I've sometimes thought the judge just put him in to run the place. It was queer what the two had in common, anyhow?"

"Andy, that place exercises a singular influence over me. I've quite a notion to spend a night inside."

"You?"

The stable-keeper looked down at John's clothes. The man from Oklahoma was not richly clad, but he looked so respectable that his companion could not reconcile himself to the proposed step.

"Don't!" he added. "The place has gone to the dogs. It is now only a grade above the quarters of tramps. The very poorest go there, and the ten cents that they cough up is the extent of their pile. You would not like it among such vermin. The rooms are now provided with rows of boards with blankets spread over them, and that's the sleeping quarters—though I believe that two rooms are kept intact, and let at fifty cents a night each."

"I'll roost in one of them, to-night."

John had made his decision, and did not waver. He spent a good deal of time in conversation with Andy that forenoon, and then, when Buck Coleman returned, he sent the trainer off to the race-course vicinity, and proceeded to spend the rest of the day alone.

He had seen the record of the drowned man, as revealed by the police books, when he was in New York a decade before, but he now walked over that way again, and had another look.

Nothing was added to his knowledge of his father's fate thereby.

The record told of the finding of a drowned man's body in the river, and of the failure to identify him for a long while, though he had on garments marked "E. A. W."—the initials of Exol Williamson—and then, finally, of his identification by former acquaintances and the sending of the body West to his wife.

This had been the fate of John's father, but the Oklahoma man was not satisfied with it. Neither by the record nor by recourse to the daily papers of that period had he been able to learn that anybody had questioned the inference that death was by drowning; and yet, for all, he did not feel that his father had died thus.

He knew that police and coroners sometimes made slips; he suspected that they had not been so careful in dealing with the case as their duty required. He could not reconcile himself to the theory of drowning by any effort of his imagination. It was not suicide, he was sure, for his father was not cowardly enough to let misfortune so overcome him as to deprive his wife and child of the aid of his manly arm and affectionate help.

"Oh! that I could penetrate the mystery of years and know just how he died!" thought the son, as he stood looking at the record.

Finally he closed the book with a sigh. Long before that he had seen the officers who had taken part in the affair, but it was one case out of many, and they knew nothing that could help him. It would be useless to see them again.

He finally left the office and went out to spend the day. When he came to New York it had been with the idea of watching over Pontiac and baffling any design that Verplanck Jones might have upon the race-horse, but he had gained such confidence in Andy Dickman that he felt he could trust all to him.

"I don't imagine Jonesy will get his claws on the old gelding right away," he thought.

It was not so easy to decide what the mood of the people at the race-course would be. His departure was rather unceremonious, and Manchester was likely to draw any sort of an inference from it.

John did not care very much about it, anyhow.

"I'll show up there again in a day or two," he thought, "and if the judge hasn't soured on me I'll show him how

amiable I can be. All I really care about is Mabel. Poor girl! she will grieve deeply for me. I don't suppose it was just right to leave her so unceremoniously. Bless the dear girl, she's the only one of the Manchester gang worth looking at—but I'm not sure I should have fallen in love with her if I had then known she was Manchester's daughter. However, I'm in for it now, and I'll stick to her."

It was a day off with the man from Oklahoma, and he saw a good deal of the city before dark.

When evening came he went to Andy's stable and proceeded to make himself look as much like a fit subject for the lodging house as he could. He needed a shave, which helped him a little. He tumbled up his hair, borrowed a rough coat of the stable-keeper, and finally put himself into a passably unprosperous condition.

To the last Andy protested against it.

"You may be killed," he reminded.

"Not this eve, Andy. But do they really do that sort of thing in there?"

"No murder was ever traced to the place that I know of, but its reputation is not good. Ask any patrolman in this vicinity."

"We will let the patrolman rest for now, but if I don't happen around in the morning you can see one of them and tell him I have been slain. Break it gently to him, old man!"

This expression was characteristic of the cool sport, and he said no more. Leaving the stable he walked at once to the old house that had been Manchester's in the days gone by.

He tried the door; it was not fastened. He pushed it open and walked in.

The adventure was fully begun.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LODGING-HOUSE DISCOVERIES.

There had been some changes made in the old house since it ceased to be a private residence, and John found himself in a narrow, dirty, ill-looking hall. It was not hard to tell where to go next. He kept on and entered a room where a man presided at a desk in some grandeur, for the lower the rank of a place that takes travelers in, the more lordly the clerk is.

A very choice lot of patrons was present. John had been told that it was not a resort for tramps exactly, but he was led to wonder where the dividing-line would be drawn. It was a ragged, dirty, miserable lot all through, and they did not give the room a pleasant odor.

He stopped to look for only a second, and then advanced to the desk with a confident air.

"Can I get a show for the night?" he inquired.

"I reckon," replied the clerk.

"How much—"

"Ten," was the laconic response.

"That gives me a room to myself—"

"Nit," was the information, in the slang of the day. "It gives you the same as the rest. A good comfortable bunk on a board. That's enough for anybody in this ward. See?"

"Have you no separate rooms?"

"Sure! Fifty!"

The clerk seemed reluctant to lose any breath, so John came right to the point. He put down a fifty-cent silver piece.

"I'll take the room."

"I'll take the fifty. Denny!"

A ragged boy appeared from somewhere.

"Show this gent to Daniel Webster."

John's first impulse was to protest against being sent into such exalted company, but he repressed the idea and followed the boy meekly. On the second floor two doors were revealed, side by side, each with a printed name on the door. One was Daniel Webster, and the other Henry Clay.

The boy unlocked the door labeled by the former name, and ushered the guest in. Within the space of five minutes he had lighted a miserable kerosene lamp and vanished. The Westerner looked around the room.

It was not small or large, and might have been a comfortable place if circumstances had not been against it. The floor

was covered with a carpet worn surprisingly thin, and the bed was a marvel of economy in the way of mattress and covers. It was dirty and rumpled. The furniture was sparse and rickety, and the whole aspect forbidding.

"Gone to seed," murmured John. "A first impression of Daniel Webster is not pleasing. I don't object to anything but the dirt. I didn't pay for that, and I hate to rob them. However, here I stay for the night."

The room soon lost its novelty, and he began to think of the past. He could not tell whether his father had ever occupied the room, but that he had been in it was altogether likely.

It gave John an uncomfortable feeling, and he was not sure he was glad he had come to the place for such a small reason. He was philosophical, however, and he settled down and began to smoke. Presently he heard sounds in the next room.

"Hallo! So Henry Clay is occupied, too. To what base uses may we not go. These men were eloquent in their lives; the rooms named after them are eloquent of nothing but dirt."

The tenant of Henry Clay was ill at ease. He moved about a good deal, and his steps were very distinct. John was surprised that he could hear so plainly, and rose to account for it.

This he soon did. What seemed to be a solid wall was, at one point, only a mere shell. Doubtless a door had once been there, but it had been replaced with thin boards, and these none too close. Big crevices were to be felt under the cover of wall paper.

"I could puncture this shell and hobnob with Henry Clay," mused the man from Oklahoma, "but he may be fatigued after a day's speechmaking, and I will not molest him."

Returning to his chair, the speaker sat down, but it was not long before steps in the hall were followed by a rap. It seemed to be at John's own door, and he had risen to answer it, when he heard his neighbor do the same thing.

"Come in."

"So you are here?"

"I seem to be."

"Thunder! You may like this place, but I don't."

"You did once."

"All's a wreck now."

"I feel like one myself."

"You don't look in condition."

"Judge, I'm all broke up."

It had not taken so much of the conversation as this to make John deeply interested. From the first there had been a familiar inflection to the voices, and now he knew them both. They were Chase Manchester and Tommy Deegan, the tout. The discovery astonished him, but he did not long allow it to rest on his mind. He could not hear every word, and as he could not understand why Judge Manchester was there, he devoted his attention to listening.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Manchester.

"It's the shock I had last night."

"Bah! Did it frighten you to be a trifle browbeaten by Williamson?"

"Williamson be durned!" blustered the tout. "I afraid of him? Well, I guess not. If he tries to bully me again I will just pull his nose and then kick him into the gutter."

"One word of advice, Tommy. Don't try it! He would eat you up. But you say that wasn't what scared you. What did it?"

"Ugh! That confounded thing under the cloth on the table. Say, I ain't no chicken, but I don't like that sort. The blamed cowboy was as dramatic as a tragedian, and he drawed it fine before he uncovered the body. Regular roast he give me, an' he got me all nerved up. Then he throwed off the cover. Whew! I would not go through it again for a dead sure tip on the Suburban!"

"Nonsense!"

"Maybe you want to try it?" snapped Tommy.

"Why need you be afraid of the body?"

"No logical reason, of course, but I

don't like dead folks, nohow. It gives me a mighty queer feel, by jing! Why, when I got out of that room I run like a race-horse that bolts. No system, but jest reeled off the yards in long leaps until I got safe away. That confounded murdered man has broke me all up. I'm as nervous as a hysterical woman, by gum!"

"All nonsense!"

"Maybe."

"Williamson was dramatic with you, and it may be he suspected you of being concerned in the taking off of young Austin. Looks that way, don't it? But he's wrong, of course."

"Sure!"

"Why the dickens did you run up here?"

"To get where I could brace up."

"I never suspected you of such weakness before. So you came to the old home? The outside looks very familiar to me, but not the interior. I can hardly realize I ever lived here."

"I can realize it easily. Here's where I hung out when you put me here ter run the place after you dropped it. This was my room. See that north wall? That leads to the room where we entertained a certain fellow some years ago."

"Hush, you fool!"

We're here alone, judge. Yes, that was his old room, and that's where we had him on exhibition, you remember. We had a door there yonder, in the old times, and it was right there, I well remember. But these old days are gone, and we are no longer what we were. Time brings changes, doesn't it? In there he delved and toiled over his little plans, wearing his brains out as an inventor. You and he had a queer hankering for inventions; I never went that way. These old walls could talk of they had tongues, but you had to leave and go down by the booming sea. That was long ago."

"Never mind your recollections, Tommy; they are stale. Now, I am here on business."

"Good! What is it?"

"You had to run away and put me to the trouble of coming all the way up. I don't like it. Why the dickens couldn't you stick to the usual round of duties? We will let it rest, though. Tommy, I have business for you."

"More about Williamson?"

"Yes. He has outlived your shot of last night, and been equally lucky with Verplanck Jones. The fellow is too quick on the trigger for any marksman in this part of the country. We must get at him some other way next."

John Williamson smiled grimly.

"The next try will result equally bad for you, my dear judge," he muttered, under his breath.

"I don't want any more of him," declared Tommy. "He's too confounded nerry for my taste. Call in somebody else. I don't want any more jobs against that icy Western feller!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BOB TRAVOR.

Chase Manchester seemed annoyed by the reply of his companion.

"Will you sit down idly and let Williamson have things all his own way?" he asked, irritably.

"What can I do?" growled Tommy Deegan.

"You are a big, bold fellow, and have never shown the white feather before. Don't begin now. Listen to me. Williamson has outwitted us finely thus far. It was the plan to have the duel cover a seizure of the horse Pontiac, but it went all wild because the Oklahomate was as cunning as we were. He has taken the horse out of sight, and to this city."

"I wish he had taken himself along with it."

"He has."

"The dickens! He has followed me!" exclaimed the tout, frightened.

"No. He simply came up with the horse, I believe. Anyhow, I've learned that he and the horse both went away on the boat for New York. Beyond doubt they are here now. I want you to find them."

"Say, you told me a bit ago that Williamson could just eat me up."

"I was joking, of course; just bantering you. He do you up? Why, that is nonsense!"

"Humph! What do you want?"

"Find him and the horse. Verplanck Jones wants the horse, and I want news of John. Then—"

"Well?"

"You have used a slung-shot before now. It makes a mighty bad hurt, and when swung by a strong arm is liable to fatally injure the skull it hits. Understand?"

"Speak it out!" directed Tommy.

"I want you to find John and finish him up."

"Finish him fer good?"

"Yes. He has become dangerous, and the sooner we part company with him the better. Don't let us delay. Move while we can. Do the work, and I will give you a hundred dollars and all you happen to find on his person."

John Williamson, listening at the connecting point, smiled grimly.

"The judge puts a bounty on my head and values me at just one hundred," he thought. "I know what I'd bring in market now, for nobody cares more for me than Chase does."

The tout did not snatch at the offer. He was afraid of the man from Oklahoma. try to bluster as he might, and the job was not to his taste. Both he and Manchester grew very much interested with the subject, and he heard them move closer together, after which they whispered for some time.

Manchester carried his point, and the listener heard Tommy agree to take up the hunt for him. The tout was to search for him carefully and persistently, and then silence their common enemy permanently.

Such was the scheme overheard by the Western man, and he could no longer doubt how his betrothed's father felt toward him.

"Fine state of affairs," he muttered.

He was not alarmed. On the contrary, he would willingly have gone in and settled the case then and there, but even in his indignation he remembered Mabel. She was his betrothed, and her hold on him was not slight enough to be cast off flipantly or put in question by headlong work. He controlled himself and patiently waited.

The judge and Tommy were progressing well with their little scheme, when John suddenly heard new sounds in that vicinity. Somebody seemed to try the door roughly.

"Who's there?" asked the tout.

"I'm here," somebody replied, sharply.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Bob Travor, an' I'm keeper o' this place."

"What do you want?"

"Let me in."

Mr. Bob Travor was impatient, and he shook the door roughly. It looked as if he was on the warpath, but Manchester did not hesitate.

"Let him come in," he directed.

Tommy moved to the door and opened it. Then Williamson heard somebody enter. The somebody soon made himself heard.

"Say, what are you ducks up to?" he demanded.

"We are simply talking," replied Manchester, evenly.

"What about?"

"Really, Mr. Travor, I do not see that it need worry you. I think my friend has paid his bill—what more do you want?"

"I want a fair deal," answered Bob, roughly. "I own this place, I do; an' no crooked work won't go down."

"I fail to understand."

"Do you ducks know me? Ever see me before?"

"I never saw you before, but my friend has. He tells me he has been here several times, and that he has always seen you here."

"So I have," added Tommy.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it. There is crooked work here. I've run this hotel eight years, an' I've owned it three years. I've got all

my cash put inter it, an' nobody can't take the house from me."

"My dear sir," mildly remonstrated Manchester, "don't get excited. Nobody wants to take it from you."

Williamson shrugged his shoulders. Bob Travor's manner indicated that he was more or less under the influence of liquor, and the listener thought it was the liquor that was talking, and that Bob was proceeding without method.

"Gammon!" the lodging-house keeper retorted to the last reply. "Say, Chase Manchester, I know you, and I'm onter your curves. You owned this house once, but you moved down-country, and this was fitted up as a hotel. You put that bloke, Mister Deegan, in here ter run it. That was about twenty years ago. My memory is better than your'n. Say, don't remember a kid who worked for you here then, do ye?"

"What kid?"

"Me!"

"You worked here?"

"Sure, you hired me, Tom Deegan, an' I was here three months, but you fired me."

"I don't remember you."

"Say, I'll try ter convince you I was here. Soon after this was started as a lodging-house that room in there—here!"—and Mr. Bob Travor moved a few steps quickly and thumped on the wall next to John Williamson's room—"was given a tenant who didn't go out to walk none. In brief, you brought a man here an' shut him up in that room. I gathered from what was said that you had kidnapped him down Coney Island way, somewheres"—John drew a quick, quivering breath—"and, anyhow, you kept him prisoner here."

"Come, come, Mr. Travor," returned Manchester, quickly, and, it seemed, with some trepidation, "you are all wrong about this."

"I ain't! The man who disputes me is a liar!" shouted Bob.

"But, my dear sir—"

"Don't lally-gag me!"

"But you are in error."

"Nit!"

"There may have been a guest here, a man possibly too ill to go out of the hotel—"

"Bosh! Hush it up! Don't give me no more. You had this man here—you sent him, Manchester, an' Tommy looked out fer him. Now, he disappeared all of a sudden. Where did he go? I could guess ef I tried. Shall I try?"

"Please pay attention to me. We differ as to that episode of the long ago, and I don't see why we need to quarrel about it. Why do you feel hostile toward us? Why are you here? We are willing to do the right thing by you, but I don't see what you have to complain of, sir. Explain, and I promise you satisfaction."

The judge spoke very gently. The explanation was not needed. Bob Travor was full of poor whisky, and it made him suspicious and quarrelsome. What was required was to talk him into better humor.

"Then," replied Bob, "don't you come snoopin' around here ter steal my house. I've bought it, paid fer it, an' I won't hev' no monkeyin' with my rights. It's mine, an' ef you try ter steal it, I'll shoot the two o' you. See?"

"Why, man, we couldn't steal it if we wanted to. You have a deed, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Then how are we to rob you of it?"

"I don't know ye'r game, but I know ye'r ways. You had somethin' against that cove you shut up in there, years ago, an' it's dollars ter cents you took his life. Oh, you two are corks, an' I know you have some skin game ter work onter me. Ef not, why did ye come here?"

"Just to talk with Mr. Tommy Deegan."

"Bah! Couldn't ye talk somewheres else? Would you come here?"

"He came here, and I came to where he was."

"I see you did, but there's mischief afoot."

"There is not."

"I know better."

"Mr. Travor, just listen to reason."

Manchester began a soothing explanation which explained but little.

John Williamson saw no reason for changing his opinion of the situation. Bob was under the influence of liquor, and he had grown suspicious because he had such guests. There was no cause for his ebullition, and he would soon be quieted.

CHAPTER XX.

A REMARKABLE BOY.

There was a steady drone of voices in the next room for some time. John Williamson took it in without giving heed to each word. He was under indebtedness to Bob Travor. The man had spoken through the medium of the liquor he had imbibed, but he had told some things of interest. The matter of the prisoner held in the room he now occupied could not be overlooked, and he felt that he had not come there all for nothing.

He looked around the barren walls.

"Here my father lived for some time. He has looked on these self-same angles and reaches, though the room was very different. If I follow Bob correctly my poor father was seized at Manchester's country home, when he had his work completed, conveyed here in the night and shut up. What next? His exact end I can't tell, but the result is known. Found drowned! There is murder on Chase Manchester's hands. Oh! the consummate knave! how I would like to go in and throttle him now!"

John did nothing of the sort. He could be patient, as well as vehement, and he bided his time.

At the end of half an hour Bob had been quieted and relieved of his suspicions by Manchester. Then his drunkenness took a new turn, and he was very friendly and amiable.

He insisted on the judge and Tommy going down to have a drink with him, and they went.

"Shall I follow?" muttered John. "No, I am best off here. One of my enemies might discover me, and so ruin all hopes of secrecy. I'll stick to it here and spend the night in the room where my poor father saw his trials and his life-tragedy."

The man from Oklahoma was growing melancholy, but he suddenly bestirred himself.

"Eh?"

There had been a knock at the door; it now came again, soft and cautious.

"Well, I don't understand that. Nobody in this ranch seems to be able to act quietly, yet this knock is cat-like. Can it be a snare for me?—can it be they have found me out?"

Tap, tap, tap!

John made a sudden resolution. He crossed the floor quickly, put his hand to the door and opened it.

Before him stood a slightly-built youth. He was as ragged as any person John had seen there, but the latter was at once impressed with the fact that the face was different. It was a red, freckled, illy-complexioned face, but it was delicate and refined, in spite of its defects.

The Oklahomaiter gazed blankly, singularly impressed by the vision, but without a word of explanation the stranger crossed the threshold, reclosed the door and stood quietly by John's side. Then he put his finger to his lips.

"Hush!" he cautioned.

"Eh?" replied the Westerner.

"Don't speak too loud."

"Why not?"

"They may hear you."

"Who are 'they'?"

"The men who are plotting against you."

"Oh! is there a gentle stir of that sort under way?"

"Yes."

"Who is into it?"

"The lodgers of the hotel."

"What ones?"

"None in particular, but just the rough fellows down-stairs. You see, you took a private room, and they think you must have money."

"So that is the situation. Isn't Bob

Traveler in it? Isn't some other millionaire in it?"

"I don't fully understand what you mean, but it is just a plot on the part of the lodgers to rob you. They seem to be a desperate lot here. Don't speak too loud. I—I am just about frightened out of my wits."

John looked curiously at the speaker. The slight form before him might have been that of a boy of fifteen, but there was a maturity of speech and action not in keeping with fifteen. It seemed that the claim of timidity was correct, for the youth looked worried. John began to feel quite an interest in him. Despite his rags and generally dilapidated appearance the youth was scrupulously clean, and that went a long way.

"Do you work here?" inquired John.

"No, I am a lodger."

"The dickens you are. You don't look like a frequenter of such a mud-hole as this."

"Soap and water are cheap, sir, and I have not always been in hard luck, but here I am now, driven by misfortune. I was down among the men, and they could see from my rags that I was as poor as they, so I was safe enough; but you do not look so poor. Then you had money enough to pay for a room by yourself, so they leaped to the conclusion you must be rich, and they would rob you."

"Um, um, um!"

Williamson muttered absently, looking thoughtfully at the youth. From the first he had been impressed with the notion that he had seen the stranger before, and the notion had grown on him. The face, the voice, the manner—all awoke memories he could recognize, but not fully grasp.

"Boy," he suddenly added, "what is your name?"

"John Williamson, sir."

"What?"

"John Williamson."

The man from Oklahoma stared blankly. The sound of his own name from another person's lips, under such circumstances, was surprising, and he was bewildered. He had hoped to hear the name of somebody known to him. The hope had been realized, but it did not help him a bit. He looked all the harder at the youth. Under this intense regard the new claimant moved uneasily.

"Where do you live?" pursued the questioner, when he recovered his breath a little.

"Here in New York, of course."

"And your name is John Williamson?"

"Ye-es, sir," hesitated the smaller John.

"Well, I'll be shot!"

"Is there anything so strange about the name? It is a plain name, and I am a plain boy, poor and hard-working, but in bad luck. I have no father or mother, and life has not gone favorably with me of late. I trust you will not think me a tramp."

Plainly the slender youth was making an effort to rally from something or other. A half-defiant air was assumed, and a manner of mannish assertion of rights.

"I am the friend of anybody who is in hard luck," replied the sport. "Mark that down. So your name is John Williamson?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"So is mine!"

The slender youth started back.

"What?" was the sharp exclamation.

"I am John Williamson."

"Not—not—not the one—"

One of the youth's hands fluttered to his heart. He looked at his companion in agitation, and a flush came to his face. Both these things, simple in themselves, were suggestive to the Oklahomate, and he suddenly clasped the arm of his companion. It was a slight arm, but finely rounded.

"I am the friend of Lew Austin, the jockey," swiftly replied the sport.

The youth recoiled from the touch.

"Oh!" he cried. "I didn't know—I didn't suspect that you were the—the—"

"I am John Williamson, number one. Who the dickens are you? You look like

Lew; you act like Lew; you speak like Lew. But you—are you his kinsman?"

The youth was deeply moved. He was mentally distressed, and the color fluctuated in his cheeks strangely. Plainly, he had a sensitive nature. He stammered more than ever when he tried to talk.

"I am not related—I—that is, I never heard of him. I never met him; I don't know him."

"But you are named John Williamson?"

"Yes."

"We are in the whirl of a singular mystery, then. I never heard of but one J. W., and I am he. Why do you look so much like Lew?"

"I—I am his brother!"

"He told me he had no brother."

"He forgot me."

"Own up! This is all very puzzling to me, and I can't get it plainly, but one thing is sure as fate. I was Lew's friend, and I am yours. I'll stand by any deserving person, and I'll stand by you. Can't you trust me? Look me over! Do I look like a villain?"

"No, oh, no!"

"I was Lew's friend."

"I know it."

"And you—you are Lew's sister!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW ALLIANCE.

John Williamson had been working to a crisis. The agitation of the youth after he learned that he was talking with another of the now much-claimed name had raised a suspicion in the sport's mind. He had been amazed, himself, and far from his usual self, and it was without much system that he proceeded, but it occurred to him that he must work up to a certain point before he sprang his revelation.

It was done now, and the effect left no doubt in his mind.

The youth recoiled, and the flush in his cheeks gave place to a marked pallor.

"No, no!" he protested.

"I repeat—you are Lew Austin's sister!" insisted John.

"I—I—can't you see that I am a boy? See my clothes! Are they those of a girl? I am a boy!"

"Be calm," kindly replied the Western man. "You are with one who will show you every consideration, and die for you, if need be. I am a man, and it is the duty of man to render to woman all respect and aid that may be needed. Be trustful! Look at me! Is there one doubt in your mind? Why, girl, I would cut my hand off before I would be other than your friend!"

It was an appeal that went straight to her heart. She wavered, hesitated; she trembled; she burst into tears.

"Oh, Mr. Williamson!" she gasped.

"What will you think of me?"

"I shall think you are like me—devoted to poor Lew."

"But I am here—here!"

"For Lew's sake, I'll be sworn."

She raised her head suddenly.

"Yes!" she declared, more firmly. "For his dear sake—for him."

"I knew it, and it speaks for your noble courage, but why—why are you here? This den of vipers; this gathering place of the vile and dangerous—why did you put you life in jeopardy?"

"For Lew's sake—for him."

"It is answer enough," replied the Western man. "There could be no nobler work, and I can understand all that's in your heart. But here herd dangerous men; you have told me yourself that I am plotted against by them. You—your risk is even greater."

The signs of weakness abruptly left her manner. The flush returned to her face, but she spoke with firmness.

"I came here to get light on my brother's murder, but I have failed. I was firm when I came, and I would do as much again. Nobody has suspected that I am not what I seem, and anybody with rags is safe here. I may have been reckless, but no harm has come of it, and I do not yet regret my act."

"Bless you, Miss Austin, I am not censuring you. I wouldn't do that for the world, if there was cause. But there is

none; I only applaud your act. Still, this is not a safe place for anybody. What more have you to do here?"

"Nothing."

"Then let us go. Let me escort you out of this den of wild animals, and to your home. Shall it be so?"

"I say yes, and I shall be glad to have it so. I am done here, and the sooner I leave the better I shall be gratified. I did not intend to remain over night, anyhow. I shall be very glad to have your aid, sir. Let us go!"

She spoke with some trepidation. It was plain that John's serious remarks had shaken her heretofore sublime courage.

"Come with me. I do not suppose we shall have any difficulty in getting out, but I will suggest that you still keep up your disguise, as far as ways go. Assume the manner of a boy as well as you can."

"I think I am equal to the occasion, Mr. Williamson. Still, it is probable that we shall not encounter anybody going out. The course is such that I think we shall be thus favored. Let us go."

Williamson moved to the door and opened it. The dimly-lighted hall was untenanted, and, though they could hear sounds of merrymaking not far away, nobody was visible to check their departure.

"Down yonder stairs," the girl directed, nervously.

They went. The ancient boards creaked under their feet, but they had it all to themselves. At one point they caught sight of a sleeping room, with rows of boards and ragged lodgers stretched out in unconscious comfort, but it was only a transient view.

Unmolested, they gained the street. To both the fresh air seemed purer and sweeter than ever before.

John looked up and down the miserable old street.

"Where now?" he asked.

"To my home. It is on the West side. We can go by car."

"Better, we will get a carriage as soon as one is to be had. Let us do our best to make the journey endurable; the hour is now late."

She took his arm, and they hastened away. The gaslight flickered on them feebly, and the tramp of an occasional foot was heard. Ill-looking wanderers skulked by, and Lew's sister pressed closer to her protector and shivered. John gazed at her and his bewilderment returned. He could not yet understand the situation, but he was firm in his confidence in her, and doubted not that she would make all plain in due season.

She had rarely been safer than then; her rags were a protection, and the trusty arm and cool nerve of the man from Oklahoma were a tower of strength.

Thus they passed from the dangerous vicinity, and a carriage was soon found and engaged. Entering, they were hurried homeward.

Conversation had been trivial since their escape, but she now broke the silence.

"I want to talk with you," she explained. "I wish to state my own position and knowledge, and to learn yours, but we have not the time to-night. The ride is but short, and I dare not prolong my absence. I had courage when it was needed most, but it seems to have dwindled all away now."

"It has served you well, and you can rest now. As you say, let us wait until the morrow; I know of no place where we can converse now. I am eager to talk with you, though, and I trust you will not disappoint me."

"Most surely not; you will find me when you come."

This plan was carried out, and when the carriage left them at the door the sport waited only to see her inside, and then hurried off to his own quarters.

"There are times," he soliloquized, "when people may well indulge in guesses to try and solve a problem. This is not one of them; I know nothing about the facts, and I might as well try to lift yonder house. No guesses—just sleep."

So he went home and to bed, and not even the excitement could prevent his sleeping well. He rose the next morning in the best of condition and had breakfast. After that he studied the clock and wondered how early he could call on the girl.

He took no chances in the way of delay, and was early at the house where he had left her. He had been indulging in some speculation as to how she would look in the garments of her own sex, but when he saw her the change was so great that he would hardly have known her if it had not been for her remarkable resemblance to the jockey.

Bluff, bold John Williamson suddenly presented a side of his character heretofore unknown to him. He saw a beautiful girl who was all blushes and confusion, and he, too, blushed painfully and did not know what to do.

It was the memory of the male garments she had worn that was so disturbing, but when they had been allowed a little time they regained their wits as sensible people will under trying circumstances.

John was invited to sit down; he sat down.

He looked at the girl, too. She was young, pretty, refined and delicate, and only a latent firmness of her sweet mouth suggested the high courage that had enabled her to go to Bob Travor's den.

"You are a complete surprise to me," confessed John, when they had regained their composure. "I have heard poor Lew speak of his sister, but if I ever knew where she lived I had forgotten it. When he was killed there was a call for his relatives, but nobody knew where they were. Nobody but me had heard him mention that he had a sister."

"Poor Lew was reserved."

"That was it."

"He often mentioned you to me, though."

"We were right good friends. I don't think, Miss Austin, that I know your first name."

"It is Lois."

"Now we are introduced."

"Yes, and we will proceed to business. You wonder, of course, why I was at that lodging-house. I went to follow the man who, I believe, was concerned in my brother's murder—Chase Manchester."

"Indeed!"

"Maybe you wonder at this temerity in saying as much, but such is the view I take of it."

"Why do you think it?"

"I must tell you something that has occurred to explain. I was with my brother a few hours before he was slain. I left him immediately before the races of that day—the last day he ever rode. I went at once to a country town. He knew I was going, but no one else did. We were far from the center of population, and I heard nothing of my brother's death until yesterday. Now, I will explain my suspicion."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE JOCKEY'S SECRET.

The man from Oklahoma nodded.

"That's right, Miss Lois. Give me all the light you can."

"Before the races, on that last day of my brother's life," proceeded the young woman, "he and I went for a walk down by the beach. When we tired we sat down among the rocks. We were concealed from view, and two men who came the same way, a little later, did not see us. They stopped so near to us that we could hear their words."

"Was one Judge Manchester?"

"Yes. The other, my brother told me, was named Tommy Deegan. He was a most ill-looking fellow, but Lew said he was connected with the races."

"What followed?"

"As we understood it, Manchester tried to hire Deegan to put you out of the way. His language was guarded, and it might have been interpreted in a different way, but so it seemed to both of us. The judge

was very outspoken on some subjects. He explained that you were engaged to his daughter, Mabel, but said that he was going to break off the match or break your head—such were his words."

"Amiable purpose," with a smile.

"He favored a Mr. Verplanck Jones, who was also a candidate for her hand, and was doing all he could to make Jones a favorite with her."

"Very kind of him."

"Further than this, the judge plainly said he had other reasons for wishing to get rid of you. He wanted help of Tommy Deegan. He was much annoyed when Deegan did not come to terms quickly. I am not able to say whether he intended to refuse definitely or was trying to get a big money offer, but he did not say yes. Please understand that nothing was said about killing you, but so my brother and I understood them to mean."

"Very likely they did. Then what?"

"The two men grew tired of standing, and Manchester suggested that they sit down. They moved forward among the rocks, and came face to face with Lew and myself."

"What did the judge say?"

"He was completely frustrated for a moment, but soon recovered somewhat. He did not try to explain his language. Probably he realized that it had not been definite, and thought he could not better a bad matter. He let it rest, and talked only of the weather. In a few minutes he and Deegan passed on, and we saw no more of them."

"I am not surprised."

"Of course Lew and I took their words just as we understood them, and Lew said he would warn you at the first opportunity."

John Williamson now knew what it was that the jockey had to tell him after the races that day.

"Beware of the judge?" Lew had said.

It was all plain at last.

"Well?" questioned the sport.

"I urged Lew, then, to be very careful. I told him he had the secret of a powerful, unscrupulous man, and that he might find it a very dangerous secret to possess. Lew assured me that my fears were groundless; that Manchester would not dare to touch him, and would have no chance to do so if he wished, but I suspect he said it as much to keep me from worrying as anything else."

"Do you know more?"

"As I told you, I left Lew just after this. I was in the country when news came, two days old, of his death. I said at once, that he had fallen by Manchester's hand, and because he had overheard what he did. My theory was combatted, and I was reminded that his death would remove but one of those who had heard the conversation, but even now I hold to my belief."

"You may be right."

"I came back to New York. Yesterday afternoon I went down by the race-track and was in time for my brother's funeral. I stayed there but briefly. I determined to start in alone and solve his death. Coming back to New York, I secured that horribly ragged suit of clothes and disguised myself as a boy. It was chance that I ran upon Manchester, last evening, but I followed him to Bob Travor's den, and, making a bold push, entered there."

"Did you learn more?"

"No."

"Did you see the judge?"

"No. He was all the time invisible."

"He was up-stairs."

"I fear you will think my course very unwomanly."

"Decidedly not."

"There is one feature of lightness about it all," added Lois, smiling faintly, "and that is my claim of your own name. I was not asked to give any name down-stairs—if I had been I should have thought of some trivial one, I dare say; but when you asked me so suddenly for my name I grew confused. I needed some name! I tried to find one; yours came to me, somehow, and I gave it."

"It was a surprise party. I was prepared for about everything, but to have

my own name thus flung at me was peculiar, to say the least."

"If I could only have done some good by my venture!"

Williamson had been studying Lew's sister closely. He had decided that she was both a fine girl and a brainy one, and he determined to confide a good deal in her.

The result was a long talk, in which much was told on both sides, and opinions and plans explained.

Later, Verplanck Jones was mentioned. It was learned that his promissory note against Lew was genuine. Lew had been buying all the real estate, from time to time, that he could find money to buy. He had lately added a new house, and a loan from Jones had enabled him to pay for it in full.

This was in Jones's favor, but it did not incline John to surrender Pontiac, and, when he had explained all to Lois, she agreed that it was both his right and duty to hold to the race-horse.

The forenoon passed in conversation. Lois was not in the best of condition, and John suggested a trip to Central Park. He would have hired a carriage, but she protested, and they went on foot.

Once there they sat down on a bench near one of the drives, and, though Lois's mind was on more serious subjects, John gave considerable attention to the horse-flesh to be seen both there and on the adjacent bridle-path.

"There is some mighty good horseflesh in New York," he remarked, anon, "but the horseback riders would throw a centaur into convulsions. Watch them bob up and down in the saddles. It is agonizing. A Western cowboy is born to the saddle, and he beats everything else in the United States. He sits like a part of his horse, keeping time to its motion, and having no other motion himself, but those fellows are jumping-jacks."

"I am told that it is the English way to ride as they do."

"Weak brains imitate things outside their own land. I am told, too, that it is the 'gentleman's' way of riding. Well, if a so-called gentleman is so anxious to have a way of his own that he will ride like a caricature, let him do it. Ugh! those horseback fellows make me ill. Now, the carriage horses are different. Good animals there. See that blood bay. A great horse he! Then there's yonder chestnut. See his slender, shapely legs. That's style for you. Then the gray is a fine animal, and the—"

John stopped short. He was thoroughly enthusiastic, and might have gone on for some time, but something cut him short abruptly.

The abrupt pause and the silence which followed caused Lois to follow the suggestion of it in his gaze. She saw a young man and a young woman in a carriage, with a uniformed driver, and there was considerable show of wealth and aristocracy.

The man, however, had one arm in a sling, which indicated that all might not be well with him.

John's gaze followed them until the carriage disappeared around a bend in the drive.

"Do you know them?" inquired Lois.

The man from Oklahoma started perceptibly. Then he quickly grew quiet once more.

"I thought there was something familiar about them."

"They don't look like members of the horse-betting fraternity."

"No."

"Not to me."

"The man was Mr. Verplanck Jones."

"Is it possible?" and Lois was more interested.

"Quite possible."

"I thought they looked a trifle alike. Maybe the lady was his sister."

"The idea had not occurred to me before," seriously answered Williamson. "It is possible, but hardly likely. Her face, too, was familiar to me; I am trying to place it. I feel sure," he pursued, with an air of deep thought, "that I have seen her somewhere before. Ah! now I have it!"

"Who is she?"

"My betrothed, Miss Mabel Manchester!"

"You are jesting," replied Lois.

"Not in the least," responded John. "It was she, the daughter of Judge Manchester. My affianced wife is taking a ride with my rival."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOUND ON THE PLAZZA.

The sport's voice was perfectly even, and his face was not shaken by emotion, but Lois could see that he was not taking the matter as coolly as his speech and conduct indicated. She could see far enough under the surface to detect that the discovery had caused deep emotion in the Oklahoma man's heart.

Verplanck and Mabel had gone by smiling, and, it seemed, happy, and it was not a discovery any man would like to make of his lady love.

"I—I did not know," murmured Lois, in some embarrassment.

"It was a wonder they didn't see us. They looked everywhere but here and ahead of them and to the sides."

Lois understood the sarcasm. The drivers had looked only at each other.

"I dare say it was a commonplace drive," she ventured.

"Certainly. You see, Jonesy carries a bullet from my revolver in his arm, and Mabel's idea, no doubt, is to ease the pain. However, the bullet is still there."

There was grim satisfaction in the remark.

"She may be looking for you," suggested the jockey's sister, feeling that she wanted to console him, and not knowing how to do it.

"She probably will find me if she keeps up such a close watch," answered John, with his old grim humor. "By the way, do you know the name of yonder flower by the shrubbery?"

The subject was changed, and no more was said of Verplanck and Mabel. If John continued to feel the sting of the discovery he gave no sign of it. All irritation disappeared, and he was amiable, talkative, and full of life during the rest of the stay in the Park.

It had not been their intention to remain long, and they finally went out, partook of a late lunch, and then, after an earnest conversation, separated for the time being.

Williamson went away with an air of contentment, and, outwardly, there was no change when he was alone. He took his way out of the city immediately, and was soon on his way to the race-course.

It was his intention to go to the track at once, but he arrived a little ahead of time, so he decided to go over to Manchester's.

"I wonder how I shall be received," he murmured. "I am pretty sure that the judge did not see me at Bob Travor's, but my sudden departure and my absence for two nights may have caused some commotion. I'll see how Chase takes it."

He neared the house. Nobody was in sight, but when he was quite close he heard a merry peal of laughter from Mabel.

"So she's back! Of course she will be glad to see me. Well, she will not get any reproaches."

His face darkened for a moment, but he soon recovered his mental equilibrium. He turned the corner of the mansion, stepped up on the piazza, and saw Mabel.

Yes, she was there—there, but not alone. Mr. Verplanck Jones sat in conversation with her, and they were having a very happy time, it seemed.

The man from Oklahoma was never quicker to meet emergencies than when they were pronounced, and though he had not been prepared for this discovery, he took it with all the equanimity possible. Not pausing for a moment, he advanced toward the couple.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Out for an airing? The day is fine, and health is in every breath one draws. How are you, Jones? Mabel, I trust you are well."

He gave Verplanck a nod, but advanced to Miss Manchester and took her hand. He remained cool and unconcerned, but both of the others seemed at a loss what to do and say. Mabel submitted to having her hand taken, but not with a gracious manner, and it was clear that John had not a warm reception from his fiancée.

She and Verplanck exchanged glances and seemed to find it hard, or possibly not to their taste, to reply.

"Anything new?" added the sport, serenely.

"No," curtly answered Mabel.

"All well?"

"Yes."

"That's good."

"If you wish to see father you will find him at the track."

It was a broad hint, but the man from Oklahoma ignored it.

"No hurry," he calmly responded.

He sat down near them, looking as satisfied as if the lady in the case was Jones's sweetheart—not his.

"The races ought to be good to-day," he pursued. "Sir Walter, Doctor Rlee and Raceland are all in it. My notion is that Sir Walter should win. What do you think, Jones?"

"I know nothing about it," shortly replied Verplanck.

"It is a risky thing to touch," admitted John, genially, "but then a bold gambler doesn't want a dead-sure thing. Sir Walter is as game a little animal as ever ran—a right good mount. His only weakness is a disposition to get off his feed at times, and it is that, if anything, that will beat him to-day, I reckon. Old Raceland is a game runner, but he's a bit stale just now."

"I do wish you would stop talking horse," cried Mabel, petulantly.

"Why, I'll risk something you will be out there yourself when the bugle blows," laughed John.

"Decidedly, I shall not," snapped Miss Manchester.

"You'll miss a good thing."

"Don't you miss it on our account," suggested Verplanck.

"Oh! I shall not."

"You can bring us word of the result."

"Yes," added Mabel, "you will find us here."

"I don't blame you," responded the sport, unabashed by these pointed remarks. "The day is fine, and the view from here is grand. Can you make out the name of yonder craft, Mabel?"

"I am not a field-glass," curtly replied the young lady.

"Ha, ha! Well said. Do you take to water life, Jones?"

"I do when I go on the water," stiffly admitted Verplanck.

"I didn't know but you took to it most on land, though some people drink other things," serenely continued the sport.

"Sir!" cried Jones.

"Naturally, a man can't go boating on land, you know."

Mabel did not seem to like the new turn of conversation any better than the subject of horse-racing, and she now remarked:

"Your room is all ready for you, Mr. Williamson."

"That's good. I didn't know but what it might have gone out for a walk. I'll stroll up that way presently. Pardon me if I take a closer look at the morning paper. I want to see the tips on the third event."

And John drew out his paper and proceeded to satisfy his curiosity. Both of his companions were glaring at him, but he was unmoved outwardly. He wished to annoy them, and there was every evidence that he was succeeding to a charm. Both looked as though they would like to throw him off the piazza. He was regarded as an intruder, and their vain efforts to drive him away left them all the more exasperated.

Verplanck hoped Mabel would settle the matter by rising and unceremoniously leaving the Western man alone, but Mabel said to herself that she would not be driven away from their chosen place, so there was a deadlock.

For half an hour this went on. John's

face beamed with good humor; he persisted in addressing both at times, and now and then he interjected jests more or less amusing to the ordinary mind, though to them he said nothing but what was mean and annoying.

Finally he rose to go.

"Well, it's about time for the fun to begin at the track, so I'll run over. I'll see you when I return."

He waved his hand benignly and left the piazza. Not once did he look around, but with a light step he took his way out of sight. If they imagined he was careless and unconcerned they made a big mistake. His expression was dark and severe during the short time he allowed himself to think of the situation.

"This winds me up with Mabel," he thought. "She has evidently decided to ship me. If she hasn't it will be all the same. She is piqued because I went to New York so unceremoniously, and she has taken up with Jones out of revenge. She can keep Jones."

A moment of reflection, and then an addition which told that the shot had not failed to make some impression.

"If he and I have another duel I may not aim at his arm!"

The entrance to the race-track was nearly reached when he suddenly met Dickey Spicer and a bronzed man who was a stranger to him. Dickey's face took on a look of great satisfaction.

"Say, boss!" he cried. "I'm right glad ter see ye."

"Of course you are, Richard."

"I thought you had died or gone inter my biz. Don't do either! My biz is awful hard on shoe-leather, an' dyin' ain't no satisfaction."

"I never heard anybody who had tried it claim it was a success."

"They are terrible silent over it, sure, boss."

"Anything new, Richard?"

The tramp pulled out his almanac and studied it carefully.

"What day is it?" he asked. "Oh! this must be the place. About this time look out fer heavy rains. That prediction is spread all over three weeks, and the almanac makers ought ter hev' a cinch. Moon rises at ten minutes past—say, I ain't got no record o' when I see ye last, but I reckon there is a bit that's new. Mister Williamson, let me present ter yer unfavorable notice Davey Smith. He ketches fish."

"Mr. Smith, I'm glad to see you," replied John.

"Ditto," agreed Smith. "Anything is better than this long-winded old pile o' rags. He kin outlast the north wind on a talk."

The fisherman's tone was not unfriendly, and Dickey remained calm.

"I talk because I kin do it without disturbin' my system. I am the gentle disciple o' rest an' sleep, an' I'm powerful down on all voylence o' emotions or other things."

"Except ter chickens," suggested Davey. "I wouldn't want you around my hen-roost."

"Ef your hens sleep, as they oughter, they are safe, but ef they go gaddin' they must take the consequences. I was honest once, but my parients besought me with tears in their cheeks ter reform, an' I did it. Nobody can accuse me o' bein' honest now."

"I know your song, Dickey, and I will dispense with the rest of it," remarked John. "I am going into the grounds, unless you have more to say."

"I hev'," declared the tramp. "Leastwise, this gent has. Cough up yer story, David."

Davey looked at John, changed his expression and spoke to the point.

"I'm a fisherman," he repeated. "I do business between here and New York, but a good deal o' the time I am jest down on the beach yonder—nigh where the jockey was found dead."

The sport started. The man's manner was too serious to be passed over lightly. If Dickey was a tramp this fisherman was not, and he looked as if he had important news to impart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT THE FISHERMAN SAW.

The man from Oklahoma looked around quickly. He did not want anybody to know of his progress in the murder case. He had ignored Detective Crane and set out to discover the guilty person himself, and he had made enough advance so that he wanted to end the matter all alone. They were free from listeners.

"What have you to tell?" he inquired.

The fisherman nodded sagely.

"I guess it will interest ye. I hev' been speakin' with this here ragged man, an' he's got me ter keep still ter everybody until I could see you. They tell me news is wanted o' Lew Austin's movements that night he was killed."

"Yes."

"He went down ter the beach with Judge Manchester."

John grasped Davey's arm.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I see them myself, an' I know them both well by sight. It was a bit after dark, but I couldn't be mistaken."

"After dark, eh?"

"Yes."

Chase Manchester had all along claimed that he was at his own house at the time specified.

"Why haven't you told me of this before?"

"I told you my fish business was between here and New York. I've been in New York all the while sence that night, or early the next mornin', fer I went just before daybreak, so I didn't know of the commotion here until I come back. I happened ter talk with this here ragged man, an' he asked me ter wait until I seen you before sayin' anything, so I've done it."

"That was right, Mr. Smith. I am the person most interested, as I was Lew Austin's friend, and so I'm the man to listen to you now. Is there more? Give full particulars."

"There ain't no more to tell. I had been around the beach, busy with my work, and I started to come up this way. As I come up I met Lew and the judge goin' down."

"Did you see anybody else?"

"No. They were all alone."

"Nobody anywhere near them?"

"Not a soul. Tommy Deegan an' Ham Higgins was down on the beach, but they don't count."

"Ah! So Deegan and Higgins were down that way?"

"Yes."

"Doing what?"

"Just loungin' on the beach. I thought maybe they was waitin' for a third man to go out with them in a boat, for they seemed to look up this way often, as if expecting somebody."

Davey made this statement with all the innocence in the world. He had a fair share of intelligence, but it did not impress him as peculiar that things were as he described.

To John it was very different. Lew and Manchester had been seen going toward the beach at a time when Deegan and Higgins were waiting there for somebody. John caught Dickey's gaze, and the tramp blinked with rapidity which told that he was not so blind to the situation.

"Did you hear anything after you met the two men going down?" continued the Western man.

"No."

"No cry from the beach?"

"I didn't notice any, or, ef I did, I don't remember it. Mebbe I could 'a' heard somethin', an' then forgot it."

"How long did you remain up this way?"

"Oh, a couple of hours, I guess."

"What then?"

"I went home, waited until near day-break, an' then got inter my boat and sailed up ter the city."

Davey's story was told, and, when he had given his promise to keep his secret for the time being, he was dismissed. He had an errand to attend to—he went and left the other men by themselves.

"What do ye make o' this, boss?" asked Dickey.

"Maybe we want to know more of it."

"I should winny!" replied the tramp. "What more do ye want? Why not go and arrest the whole gang right off?"

"It would be premature. We must have them more fully in our grip. This is my first experience as a detective, and, as I am rashly going it alone against such a good man as Detective Crane, I must not make a botch of it."

"You know best. I ain't seen Tommy Deegan down here sence we had him at the old mansion, after he tried ter shoot ye, but Mister Ham Higgins is here. He calls hisself a guide, en' explains what that means by sayin' he takes strangers in tow and shows 'em where ter go, around an' in the race-grounds, an' where they kin bet an' how. Reely, he is in with Tommy Deegan ter do the tout act, but guide it is, if Ham says so."

"Does Ham still occupy his old quarters?"

"Yes."

"And Tommy's room?"

"Waits fer its darlin' ter come back. It's empty while Thomas is away in the wilds o' New York."

John paced back and forth several times, and then stopped in front of his companion again.

"Dickey, you are a bold man?"

"Yes, boss; I'm a bold, bad man."

"Did you ever break into a house?"

"Yes, I've broke inter houses, an' broke out o' jail."

"Dare you go with me to-night, to Deegan's room, and, when there, make a search of the premises? Remember, it will be contrary to law, for, though we are doing the full work of detectives, we have no license, commission, or permit in that direction."

"I don't mind breakin' the law, boss. I've done it many a time. I am a habitual criminal, with a red record an' a ferocious heart. Ef my duties as an apostle o' rest didn't take up so much time, I should be the most notorious criminal in America."

John smiled briefly. He was beginning to understand Richard fully. He was a tramp, and his person was covered with dirt, but he was as mild as an infant, and it would not have been dangerous to bet that he had not the slightest crime to his record; but Dickey was eccentric, and he liked to claim startling things.

"Unless Lew disposed of considerable money before going down on the beach," pursued John, after a brief pause, "he had quite a sum along with him. Now, if the touts secured this money it has been held on to, you can wager something. Again, there is the possibility that some incriminating thing may be in Deegan's room. I want to go there secretly to-night, and try to find something. I need you as a helper. Will you go along?"

"Sure."

"Then let us meet here at eleven o'clock."

Dickey whipped out his almanac and marked a certain spot with a smear from his soiled finger.

"Best ter make a note o' the hour," he explained. "The moon rises at twelve. By marking the twelve I know our engagement is at 'leven."

"I don't follow your system, but I reckon you'll be there. Don't fail! Now I'm going in."

The man from Oklahoma paid his money and passed through the gates. The first race was run, but the betting-ring was crowded with the faithful preparatory to the second event, and John joined them with as much zeal as if his sole object and most serious object in life was to bet on horse-races.

He submitted to the elbowing of the crowd with perfect equanimity, and did his share, too, and he hastened about among the dense mass of humanity to scan the various slates and get the best chance to place his money.

He did this in due season, and then, as he really had other matters in mind, left the ring in time to get a good position among the rail-birds. It was an exciting event, and the outwardly cool plungers mixed with the excited, dapper little pikers, all eager to see the result.

John Williamson had his mind on other matters. A look at the judges' stand showed him Chase Manchester there with the other judges, and the plotter was as calm as if he did not deal in deeds of bloodshed as well as racing.

It was not a good day for the talent, and even the Oklahoma sport dropped a trifle more than he won, but he took it with perfect good-nature. While others stormed because some jockey allowed himself to be pocketed, or took his mount wide at the turns, or called on his mount so quickly and fully that the animal died in front before the fourth furlong was reached, John just pocketed his losses and laughed at the others.

When all was over he was slow to go out, and thus it was that, moving idly about among the scattering remnant of the crowd, he came face to face with Chase Manchester.

It almost seemed to John that he could still hear the ring of his present companion's voice as he bargained with Tommy Deegan to kill the Western sport, but perhaps the judge had not so good a memory.

Quickly he recovered from his surprise at meeting Williamson, and held out his hand.

"Hallo, John, my boy!" he bluffly exclaimed, "are you around again? Glad to see you; glad to see you!" and he shook the younger man's hand cordially.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DRINK OF CLARET.

Williamson, not to be outdone, returned the hand pressure with equal warmth, and, like his companion, permitted his face to beam with good-nature and apparent good-will.

"I've drifted around again, judge," he replied.

"So I see, and you are very welcome. Has all been well with you?"

"Every blessed thing."

"Such an unsophisticated old fossil as myself," added the judge, with a wink, "is naturally nervous when a friend goes to the wicked city."

"I was nervous myself, but I managed to pull through."

"Why the dickens did you go so suddenly?"

"Didn't you find my note?"

"Oh, yes, but nobody would have harmed you concerning the duel. It was done so quietly that, really, only the principals knew of it."

"Well, I thought it best to keep out of sight for a while. You see, here in the effete East you are finical about such things. Now, a man need never run off in Oklahoma. If a fellow kills a married man in a duel he just heads a subscription for the widow, and he and she are the best of friends from that time on. I know of several instances where the successful duelist was so thoughtful as to propose marriage to the widow, the same day he shot her husband, and they were married inside a week. That's Oklahoma style, and what I call chivalry."

The sport was serene and apparently candid, and if the judge doubted the truth of his remarkable statements, they were not disputed.

They proceeded to the house together, and found Mabel and Verplanck Jones still on the piazza. Manchester well knew that his once prospective son-in-law from the Wild West was of a very even temperament, but did not imagine John would take the scene with composure. Much to his surprise Williamson was never in happier mood, outwardly. The sport walked up to the couple quietly.

"You ought to have been over at the track," he declared. "We have had a great day. Those who played the dope didn't have a cinch, but there was good running. The selling plate was as stiff a brush as I have seen. Eh, judge, and wasn't it beautiful how Bergen lifted his mount at the finish?"

"That's right."

"The fifth event, for maidens, was a corker, too. Eh, judge?"

Williamson rattled on, the judge acting as his echo, and the others sat like statues,

If Mabel ever meant to forgive her runaway lover she was not ready to do it yet. Jones simply scowled and said nothing.

Noting all this, Manchester diplomatically managed, by a good excuse, to get the Westerner inside the house.

"Jones was taken ill down here, so we had to do the decent thing by him," Manchester explained, apologetically, "and, of course, he will be here but briefly. He will soon return to New York."

"Nonsense! Why not keep him here? I begin to rather like Jonesy. He's a pleasant, sociable fellow."

"I fear there would be some irritation."

"Not a bit. Jones and I can afford to sink our difficulties. Give him a fair show, judge. We shall all like him when we get more acquainted."

Manchester looked a little staggered. He was a man of monumental assurance, but was not in the same class with Williamson of Oklahoma. The latter's buoyant coolness was simply astonishing.

Being near the supper hour, there was only time for ablutions when the bell rang. All met at the table. Mabel remained in her sulky mood, and Jones was not much better. But the conversation did not flag. John talked rapidly, and a stranger would never have suspected the true state of affairs.

After the meal they adjourned to the parlor. Mabel had looked out, as if meditating another adjournment to the piazza, but a damp breeze was coming up from the water, and a suggestion of fog in the air shut off the plan, so all kept together. But, still determined to snub John, she took Jones to one side and kept him apart from the rest.

Even this did not trouble the Westerner, and his jovial voice was rarely more busy.

Chase Manchester and Otis exchanged frequent glances. They could not see how Williamson could so serenely witness his rival monopolizing Mabel, but the Western man had outstripped them in dissembling so fully that they despaired of understanding him in any degree.

Two hours passed in this way; then John yawned broadly and looked at his watch.

"I don't like to disappoint you good people," he remarked, "but I really think I shall have to go to bed. The temptations of New York kept me up a bit later than usual last night, and now I must turn in early."

"Wait a bit," suggested Manchester. "Let us have a drink of claret punch all around, before we go."

Without waiting for assent or refusal he touched the bell, and when the servant appeared he gave his order:

"Claret, sugar, and accessories."

The articles were brought on a tray, and the judge proceeded to mix five drinks. He prided himself on his ability to do such things well, and it was no new thing in the family circle. The servant stood by the door while his master did the work; Mabel and Jones cooed gently in one corner, and John talked loudly to Otis of the events of the day.

Finally, the mixing done, Manchester brought the glasses on the tray and set it on the table, with an array of straws.

"Come here, all of you," he directed.

The table had been quite close to Williamson, but the judge, with a skillful motion, wheeled it yet nearer, so that it almost touched the man from Oklahoma. The glasses were arranged with one at each corner of the tray, and one in the middle, so that this arrangement brought one of them much closer to John than the others.

Mabel and Jones condescended to come forward for the claret, and a circle was formed around the table, only John and Otis sitting.

Thus far Williamson had felt only the most commonplace interest in the matter, but suddenly a peculiar idea entered his mind, and one he might have rejected if he had been allowed more time to think, but the time was not his. The idea remained, and he abruptly acted on it.

Throwing back his head, he pointed toward the window.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "There's a flash of lightning!"

Every eye but his own followed the di-

rection, when he deftly turned the tray one-fourth of a circle around.

"I see nothing of it," replied Manchester.

"Lightning waits for no man," calmly reminded John. "It went instantly. Wonder if we are in for a thunder-shower?"

"I don't think so. Probably it was heat lightning."

"Very likely. Rain is needed, though, and we won't complain if it comes, I reckon."

"Of course not. Well, our claret waits."

John coolly took the glass now nearest to him.

"If it is knocking at the door, let us take it in," he replied.

All lifted their glasses.

"Allow me to suggest a toast," added the Westerner. "May we live as long as we prosper!"

"That's characteristic of you," smiled the judge.

"So is this."

John poured down the wine, dwelt on the taste and nodded.

"A good article, judge."

"Excellent. I buy only the best."

With this Manchester turned to the servant, who removed the tray and empty glasses. Williamson was silent for a moment. The turning of the tray had brought the glass which had first been next to him around to Verplanck Jones's side, and Jones had drained its contents! This seemed to impress the sport for a moment, but he presently rose and yawned again.

"Now I am off," he added. "I'll see you in the morning. I trust we may have a little music from the thunder clouds to make us sleep. Good-night all!"

Chase Manchester and his son answered heartily, but there was no audible sound from Mabel or Verplanck.

The Oklahomaiter went to his room, sat down by a window and began to smoke serenely. He was thoughtful for a period.

"I reckon I am wild. Why in thunder I suspected that the judge might have doctored that claret I don't know. It was just one of the headlong suspicions a man will sometimes get, and then laugh at it the moment after. It was wild on my part; of course the wine was all right—probably! Anyhow, we will see how it agrees with Verplanck Jones!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

TROUBLE IN THE TOUT'S ROOM.

For an hour Williamson sat by the window and watched the occasional zigzag lines of lightning quivering along the horizon. By that time he had smoked to his satisfaction, and it was the hour for further work. He rose, stepped out on the upper piazza, and from there made his way down to the ground.

There was no sign of life or lights in the Manchester mansion.

Leaving the vicinity he walked briskly until he reached the point where he was to meet Dickey Spicer. Dickey was already there, and wide awake for a sleepy man.

"Hallo!" exclaimed John. "Have I kept you waiting?"

"Not long, I guess," was replied. "though it's so dark I can't look at my almanac and see the time o' night."

"Would that tell you?"

"Sure! The almanac is my watch."

"Dickey, you would have been a genius if you had been gifted with a few more eccentricities. The dividing line is fine and invisible, but you don't quite get there. All ready?"

"Yes."

"Then come on."

They walked over to where Tommy Deegan roomed when he was at home. Williamson had no love for the work now ahead of them. He was a bold man from a wild part of the country, and he liked to talk nonsense about the deeds of that section, but really nobody had a more earnest devotion to what he considered law and honesty, and he did not like the idea of entering anybody's house irregularly. Still, there was no help for it, and he tried to put his compunctions aside.

Tommy Deegan had not lived ostentatiously. On the other hand, his room was in one of the plainest houses in the vicinity. The building was old, weather-beaten and unprepossessing. It was small, and gave space for but few tenants. Tommy's room had been in a wing, so it was practically isolated from the main part of the house.

This pleased John, for it rendered them much safer from discovery by those still in the house.

"How do we go in?" asked the sport.

"See that frame with the vines on it?"

"Yes. We can't climb it, though; it will be sure to break under our weight."

"Nixey! I've tried it, an' you kin bet it will hold if we are decently careful. It's jest the peach. We kin go an' come an' leave no sign."

"So be it, then!"

They moved forward, and Dickey laid hold of the frame and slowly ascended. When he reached the window he opened it and passed inside. His success pleased John, who promptly followed. The support wavered under him, but did not fall.

He was soon in the room with his aide.

"It is unlucky that we must have a light," observed the leader. "It will be too conspicuous on the outside to suit me."

"We'll do our level best, boss, an' this is the how of it."

Dickey struck a match, and what followed was to John's liking. Dickey had a dark-lantern, and its light would be far less than that of an ordinary lamp. By the means thus provided they surveyed the room.

"Tommy did not have much here, either of his own or his host's."

"Makes the job all the shorter. I'll hold the glim, boss, an' you do the searchin'. Oh! this is like old times, when I used ter burglarize mansions an' revel in the fat o' the land. Millions an' millions I hev' carried off in this style, boss."

"Nonsense! Your burglar exploits are about as reliable as your almanac. Turn the light this way, and don't talk any more."

There was a bureau at one side, and this was the object of John's attention. He proceeded to look in the drawers. It was not hard to do, for Tommy Deegan had little there to make progress slow.

John found only the barest trifles, articles of minor wear, and no letters or other objects that could call for close scrutiny.

In a short time the room was fully searched, and nothing remained but the closet off of it. Here, if anywhere, discoveries would be made, and both searchers brightened up.

"Here's his clothes, a-hangin' on a nail," remarked Dickey.

"And here are the pockets. A knife, a key, a few small coins, a full line of stubs to grand-stand tickets. Tommy must have been in love with such things."

"He took away more o' them than o' money, I guess. What have you got there?"

"More stubs, partly of tickets. Well, well, Tommy had a wild turn of mind. That's all he did have; the clothes are all gone through, and nothing has come of it. Is there more?"

Dickey scratched his head.

"By jing! I don't see what more we kin do. Where kin we look?"

"I know of nothing. Confound it! We have had our labor all for nothing. We may as well go home and be done with it. I should have known the tout would not leave incriminating evidence around. Come!"

Dickey started to back out of the closet, but suddenly stepped back and shut off the light of the dark-lantern.

"What is it?" demanded his leader.

"Hush! Listen!"

"Somebody stirring, by Jove! Are we discovered?"

"I'm a bit afraid we be, fer there is sounds, sure as you live."

"Hush! The noise is outside. Listen!"

John put his head out of the window. There was a slight creaking, and the sound of labored breathing.

"Say!" he added. "I do believe somebody else is climbing up the vine-frame."

"Jewhicketty!" muttered Dickey.

Both kept still, waiting eagerly. Suddenly a human head was outlined against the sky. A man was there; he had climbed just as they had done.

"This grows interesting," thought the sport.

There was a brief delay, during which the unknown appeared to be reconnoitering. Then he raised the window and crept inside.

"We are in for it," decided John.

Cautiously the intruder moved, seemingly anxious to avoid being heard. Presently he scratched a match and lighted the lamp. Then discovery came quickly—it was Ham Higgins, the so-called guide, and partner of Tommy Deegan.

Williamson had the closet door nearly closed, but kept a small opening to observe Ham. He could not understand the situation. If Ham had come openly there would have been nothing in it. Why should he come secretly, when Tommy was his friend?

The fellow stood inactive for a moment. The room being fully lighted, he took in the details. Then he nodded and a smile overspread his coarse, unpleasant face.

"All right!" he muttered.

Plainly he did not anticipate danger, or think it necessary to take any precautions. The closet was ignored. He stepped at once to one side of the room, moved a chair aside and then lifted a corner of the well-worn carpet.

"Ah!" breathed John.

The floor uncovered, the fellow touched a certain board. He pulled at it; it resisted his touch. Then he produced his knife, ran one blade under the edge of the floor piece and pried.

A section of the pine board then was loosed and lifted, whereat Ham dropped on his knees and ran his hand into the recess under the floor. Soon the hand came out holding a small package.

Ham rose to his feet, and a smile overspread his face.

"I've got it!" he muttered, aloud, and immediately advanced to the table.

The package was thus exposed to John's view, and it interested him deeply. What was it that had led Ham Higgins to take so much trouble? He was quickly shown.

The tout's partner proceeded to unroll the covers of his trophy, and fold after fold was removed, until, at length, the last fold was removed and the contents flashed before Williamson's eyes.

He saw a roll of bank-notes!

Ham had unearthed a goodly sum of money. What was it?

CHAPTER XXVII.

A JOLLY SET-TO.

Ham Higgins smiled a broad and satisfied smile. He handled the bank-notes with every appearance of joy over their possession.

"Oh! you beauties!" he murmured.

Williamson knit his forehead. Something about the look of that roll of money impressed him strongly.

Ham kept up his movements. He touched the bills as if they were old friends fit to be taken to his bosom and embraced, and his smile lingered. Presently, however, he ceased such useless work. He raised his head. His expression became earnest and determined.

"That's money enough to last me fer some time," he spoke, aloud. "I will take it an' go ter Chicago. That's a big place, an' I kin hide so nobody will find me fer years' ter come. It's a little tough on Tommy, but I don't know but he has come ter grief. He's gone off, an' he don't come back. I can't take no chances. The money is here, an' somebody should have good out o' it. Yes, I'll take it an' skip."

He looked down at his garments.

"I wonder ef Tommy hasn't got some better clothes than these?"

With this expression he started for the closet.

"We're in fer it!" muttered Dickey Spicer.

They were in for it, as John Williamson clearly saw, and, as discovery was certain, he did not try to avoid it. Calmly he flung the closet door wide open and stepped out. He and Ham came face to face.

It was a startling surprise for the race-track guide. He stopped so abruptly that he nearly fell over, and his eyes grew big and wild as he found himself thus confronted. The worst was to come. He had left the money on the table, and John again started forward. Before the dumfounded guide could recover his wits the roll was in John's hands and the latter again confronting the burglar.

Although Ham's eyes threatened to shoot out of his head, it seemed, he finally regained enough composure to recognize Williamson, and with the recognition came a degree of method on his part. It was not the people of the house who had discovered him, and matters might have been worse, he thought.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"It is you and me," calmly replied John.

"What are you doing here?"

"Watching you."

"You have no right here."

"You have, of course. Else why did you enter by the window?"

"I shall call for help."

"Go ahead."

Ham's gaze wandered to the dark-lantern which Dickey still held.

"You are burglars."

"Yes," replied John, "and here is our trophy."

He held up the roll of money. Ham started forward.

"Give it to me."

"Gently, my good sir; gently! What would you do with this money? What do you know of it?" and as he spoke he ran his fingers through the bills, surveying them more carefully.

"It is Tommy Deegan's—his an' mine, I mean."

"Oh! do you claim it?"

"Yes."

Williamson passed swiftly forward until close to Ham's side.

"Did you take this money from Lew Austin's pockets at the same time you murdered him?" demanded the sport, in a thrilling voice.

He had tried the effects of intense dramatic action, hoping by this device to upset Higgins wholly and reduce him to abject cowardice. It was well planned, but the result was not to his liking. Before, Ham had been thoroughly unnerved, but the very magnitude of the new accusation roused the iron in his nature. He cooled off instantly.

"What guff are you givin' me?" he demanded, defiantly.

"You killed Lew Austin!"

"Bah! Be you dreamin'?"

"This money was Lew's."

"That's a lie! It's mine—mine an' Tommy Deegan's. Give it here!" and he held out his hand.

"Gently, Mr. Higgins! This money is not new to me. I handed it to Lew just before he was killed; he had it on his person when the deed was done. How came it here? I can tell you plainly. You and Deegan killed him; you brought the money here and concealed it. Fool! do not think to evade the punishment that you deserve. This is not a chance encounter. All along the officers have been on your track. Your every movement has been watched. Now you are run to earth, and you are taken with the tell-tale money in your possession!"

Again John waxed dramatic, and his was a fine effort, but he did not find easy prey. Higgins bore up wonderfully well for one situated as he was. His expression was worried, but he was doggedly firm.

"All this is a bluff," he retorted. "You think you kin get me ter let up on you fer breakin' inter this house by accusin' me. It won't work; you can't scare me fer a cent. Hand me the money!"

He extended his hand, determined and sullen, but John shook his head with equal firmness.

"No."

"It's mine."

"Then you stole it from Lew Austin's body."

"What's all this talk about Lew? I know nothin' about it. You knew Lew, an' mebbe it was you who murdered him. I didn't do it. You can't talk me inter no hysterics, fer I am innocent, an' the game won't go. Give me the money!"

"Ham, do you know why Tommy Deegan has not been around?"

"No, and I don't care."

"Tommy has come to grief. You and he have been hunted and watched all the while. We have nabbed him, and now it's your turn. Fool! why haven't you seen through the device? I am no Western man, but a detective in disguise. Yes, and I've run you down!"

"You go ter thunder!" growled Ham.

Williamson was not blind. He had seen obstinate men before, and they acted just like Higgins. He decided that he would throw breath away by talking to the big guide. Consequently he decided upon a new line of conduct. He determined not to let Ham slip after all that had been said and done, so he looked for a way of taking care of the prisoner.

"Dickey," the man from Oklahoma directed, "bring yonder halter here," and he pointed to the article named, which hung on a hook.

"Here we be," cheerfully answered Dickey.

"Cut it into one long strip."

"Say! what ye goin' ter do?" demanded Ham, uneasily.

"Tie you up, sir."

"I'll be hanged ef you do!"

"You'll be shot if I don't," replied John, producing his revolver.

"Say, give me that money."

"No, Hamilton, you can't have it. It is wanted to prove that you killed Lew Austin. It will be used at your trial—"

"We'll see."

Higgins wheeled and made a dash for the window. He risked a good deal with the revolver in John's hand, but the latter raised it only to let it drop again. He dared not venture on a shot, as it would bring them into too much danger of discovery.

Dickey was nearer to the window. He made a forward movement to seize the guide, but missed him by a hair's breadth. Another moment and, without the least precaution, Higgins leaped out of the window.

"Thunder! he's a dead man!" Dickey exclaimed.

Williamson pushed Dickey aside and hastened through the opening himself. Bold as he was he would not venture on such a headlong jump as Ham had taken, but he was speedy. He swung himself out, hung for a moment from the frame and then dropped. He landed with considerable of a shock, and barely kept his feet, but, after staggering for a moment, he succeeded in recovering his equilibrium.

He had hoped to find Higgins, and it did not seem that any one could take such a leap in headlong fashion and sustain no injury, but he looked in vain for the tout's friend. Ham had vanished. John ran out several yards from the house and looked to see further, but the fellow had made good use of his advantage and was not to be seen. The pursuer knew not which way to go, so there was nothing to do but remain where he was.

Presently Dickey joined him.

"Great Jimmy Hill! be you alive?" demanded the tramp.

"The scoundrel has beaten us."

"Wasn't he mashed flat by the fall?"

"He's gone!"

"I'm sorry fer that; but now I think of it, I remember that the signs of the zodiac wasn't right fer our enterprise, accordin' ter my almanac. The sign was in the feet, or some such place, an' that is dead against success. We should hev' waited. Now, the almanac says plant seeds an' go fishin' when the sign is inter the head in my edition. It may be a bit out."

"Silence! No more of nonsense! We have lost him."

"No doubt of it."

John was silent for some seconds, and Dickey was too much affected by the rebuff to break the pause. Finally the younger man looked up suddenly.

"But we have the money," he added. "I can't swear it was the same I paid Lew Austin for the horse Pontiac, but it is precisely such a roll in looks. I believe we have taken another step. We will yet avenge Lew!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STARTLING ACCUSATION.

Williamson handled the roll of bank-notes mechanically. He had paid Lew Austin for Pontiac with a sum of money he had himself lately received. He did not know the number of any bill in the collection, but the general form of the roll was exactly like that he had secured from Ham Higgins, and when in the room, a few minutes before, he had looked at it closely enough to see that the general run of the denominations of the bills was alike in both cases.

He believed he had secured the roll he had paid to Lew, and which the latter had taken away with him the night of the tragedy.

John and Dickey did not linger near the house, but walked on and made some further search for the guide, but Ham was not to be found.

Their work was done, so they separated, finally, and each took his way to the destination of the night.

Over two hours had been consumed in the work, and it was then past two o'clock. John noted this casually as he moved toward Judge Manchester's, but he was so deeply in thought that nothing but the case of Lew Austin occupied his mind.

He reached the mansion, and, gaining the lower piazza, ascended to the upper one.

"I had just as soon the honorable judge would not know I have been out," he thought. "Maybe Ham will tell him all to-morrow, and then, again, it may be that Ham will be a score of miles away when day dawns. He bore up well under my accusations, but that does not prove him innocent. He may skip."

John stepped from the piazza into his own room. He had vaguely thought that he would retire in the dark, so as to show no betraying light, but when he reached the room he had a surprise. He had left the door that led to the hall closed, and all of the house had been dark, but a new state of affairs was revealed.

His door was open, and not only did light show in the hall, but voices floated up to him.

"The dickens!" he muttered. "The place is astir? What does that mean?"

He stood inactive, but while the pause was still on footsteps sounded in the hall and Mabel suddenly appeared. He saw her at once, and was not a little moved when he noted that she was pale and agitated. His surprise was increased, and, worried without suspecting the cause, he stepped out of his room.

"Anything the matter?" he asked, in his hearty tone.

The girl turned quickly. She had given a nervous start, but she had good nerves and the feeling of apprehension was soon over. Even then he saw her face harden and she came toward him quickly.

"Have you come to gloat over your work?" she demanded, angrily.

"Really," he replied, "I don't know that I have done any work."

"It is infamous, infamous!" she exclaimed.

"I fail to follow you. Be so good as to explain."

"There is blood on your hands!" she declared.

He held them up with his cool unconcern.

"I don't see any," he literally replied.

"But you will not escape justice."

"Why should justice want me?"

"For seeking to murder Verplanck Jones."

"There would have been no duel if he hadn't challenged me."

"I don't mean that, and you know I don't."

"Then what do you mean?"

"You have tried to kill him to-night—tried to kill him in a base and cowardly way. He is dying of poison!"

"What?"

"Verplanck Jones is dying of poison!"

Like a flash came to John the recollection of the drink of claret, and the step he had taken under the impulse of a singular whim. It was a startling recollection, now, and he moved quickly to Mabel's side and grasped her arm.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

"If you were innocent you would not be so thick of comprehension. But that proof of your guilt is not needed—I know well how you hate Mr. Jones. Do you see how the house is in uproar? Do you see how fully it is lighted?"

Williamson did see it now, but he had not done so when he came home, for the good reason that the lights were so grouped that they did not show on his side of the house.

"Is Jones sick?" he replied.

"He has two doctors with him, and a messenger has been sent to New York for more, but he will not live until they come—I know he will not. He is dying!"

Mabel burst into tears, while Williamson gazed at her blankly. He had no reason to give Verplanck Jones any great amount of affection, and he was not likely to go into a decline if Jones died, but there was more to it than this. If Jones was poisoned somebody had done it. Who was it?

Not John Williamson. His way was not dark or secret or cowardly—he fought in the open. Who, then, was the poisoner? Chase Manchester had mixed the drinks; he had placed them on the tray so that one was close to John's hand and all others some distance away; a singular impulse had led John to exchange the glasses, and Jones had got the glass intended for him.

It took the man from Oklahoma just about ten seconds to decide the matter in his own mind. Manchester had endeavored to hire Tommy Deegan to kill him. Had the judge tried to forestall his minion?

Mabel did not shed many tears; it was not her way. Drying the pearly drops she again wheeled upon her companion.

"Murderer, murderer!" she exclaimed.

"See here! What the dickens do you mean?" retorted John.

"Murderer!" she repeated.

"Suppose there has been somebody poisoned—what have I to do with it?"

"You have all to do with it. You poisoned him."

"Where is your proof?"

"It is in Mr. Jones's dying struggles; in his intense sufferings; in his ruined life and early death."

"And you say I did it?"

"I do!"

"I'm lucky for you that you're a woman—mighty lucky! But even a woman can't go on in this way. Prove what you charge or stop your noise. I won't have it. I'll forget that you are a woman—But no, no! I am hasty. Forget my ill-tempered words. Mabel, you accuse me of a terrible crime. You are—you must be jesting!"

"I am in earnest."

"You speak hastily. You should know me by this time. You saw me in the West through several months. Did you ever know me to hurt, or take advantage of anybody meanly?"

"People do not always show their true colors in a day or a month."

"A would-be assassin! Is that where you set me down?"

"Just there."

"Mabel, do you remember what we are to each other?"

A gleam of passion passed over her face.

"We are nothing to each other!" she declared.

"Nothing?"

"My eyes were opened even before to-night. I have seen you as you are, with all of your weakness and guilt. John Williamson, we are nothing to each other. I repudiate the bond!"

"Oh! so the wind blows that way, does it?"

"I am done with you."

"It is well to be frank. Your decision is eminently proper, and I approve of it fully. Let us call it off—it is better so. But when you charge me with a foul crime you get on other ground. I have never harmed Jones, and I will not listen quietly to such charges. Nobody else would make them—"

"No?"

"They would not dare."

"Do not think because you are a Western bully and quick on the trigger, that you can carry all before you. You will find that the residents of this section are your equals. I know what rumor says of your duel with Mr. Jones; it says that you took unfair advantage by firing before the signal was given—"

"That will do!" curtly interrupted the man from Oklahoma. "The signal for shooting in the duel was another revolver shot. Nobody could get ahead of such a signal. Even Jones would not have the nerve to claim that. I do not care to talk with a hysterical and bitter woman, however, and we will drop it—"

"No doubt you would like to drop the whole business, but don't think you can make it work so easily. Everybody understands your latest move. You poisoned Mr. Jones, and then fled from the house. Now you have come back secretly—to get something valuable you had forgotten, I dare say—and your whole course is that of a craven."

"Mabel—"

"You will find the law on your track."

"Better deal with the law than a vindictive woman."

Thoroughly disgusted, Williamson turned away, but at that moment Judge Manchester appeared in the hall. He saw John and stopped in uncertainty. He seemed undecided as to what he should do, but it was not so with the Western man. Quickly he strode to the judge's side.

He was determined to force an interview, be the result what it might.

"What's all this talk about Jones?" he demanded.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BRAVE MAN UNDER FIRE.

The abrupt inquiry did not seem to startle the judge, but the gravity of his sleek face did not lessen. He rubbed his chin gently, sighed and slowly answered:

"Mr. Jones is ill. Quite de—cl—dedly ill, John."

"What's the matter?" swiftly demanded the Oklahomalte.

"The doctors speak of poison."

"Accidental or criminal?"

"Let us trust, accidental."

"We are not in a trustful mood—at least one of us is not. Your daughter accuses me of having tried to poison Jones deliberately. She accuses me!—though the dickens only knows how I could do it, if I wanted to."

"You were by the glasses when we had the claret," interrupted Mabel, quickly. "You made us all look out of the window. Why? Did you then slip the poison into his glass? I say you did, and the law will say so, too."

"Why in thunder should I want to kill Jones?"

"Because you had discovered that he had been preferred to you by me," decidedly explained Mabel.

"Bless your dear soul, Jones can have you and no bills to pay. I really believe that Jones is more fitted to your nature than I am. By all means let Jones take you—good-by, and be happy with Jones. But this poisoning matter—why, it's infamous."

"Your work is infamous, and so is every thought you have."

Chase Manchester made an imperative gesture.

"No more of such talk, Mabel. It is

wrong to let rash judgment thus affect you, and I am here as defender of John until the last man leaves him. You and he may break off your romance if you will, but John and I have been associated in business matters, and I stand by him. Child, go to your room."

Mabel tossed her head.

"I will go to Mr. Jones," she amended, defiantly.

Nobody objected, and she hastened along the hall and entered the room of the afflicted Jones.

"Now, John," pursued Manchester, benignly, "after all of the girl's foolish words you will want to know more of this. In brief, it is as follows: Verplanck Jones has been taken suddenly and desperately ill. A doctor was summoned—all of the doctors here have been summoned. More, we have sent to New York, in great haste, and the best talent of the metropolis will be added to those working over Jones."

"Who says he is poisoned?"

"All of the doctors."

"Poisoned with what?"

"They have not decided."

"What are his chances?"

"They are all frightened over him, but my way is to hope on. Despite the adverse medical decision I hope for the best—though, really, to be frank, I doubt if Jones survives the night."

"Am I accused of doing it by others as I have been by Mabel?"

"Well, there are some—ahem, ahem!—some singular whispers among the servants, and one of the doctors—ahem!—asked me if Jones had any enemy. Of course I knew you had settled that little dueling affair, and I told him no!"

"I am not yet publicly accused?"

"No."

"Judge, Mabel accuses me. What do you think?"

Chase Manchester's face lighted up wonderfully. He took his companion's hand and shook it warmly.

"John, my boy," he replied, feelingly, "I stand by you! I know you would not do such a thing. It isn't like you. I know you too well, John. Still, I am not all there is in the world, and I can't govern all outsiders. There are ugly whispers, and there may be a bit of friction. I am going to stand by you. If you are arrested, communicate with me and I will get you the best of legal aid."

It was a fine sample of acting, and the man from Oklahoma was not to be outdone. His time had not come to accuse the judge, and he had his part to play. He slapped Manchester on the back.

"You are a trump, judge! You have the true Western spirit of comrade loyalty. Such men as you add to the nobility of the world as few men do. I thank you for your good words. Believe me, they are appreciated at their full value."

Chase wrung the hand in his grasp again.

"We are in full accord, John. Now, I have duties to perform, and I must hasten away, but I am always at your call. Depend on me if you get into trouble. We understand each other."

"So we do, judge."

"Now I will leave you, for I think it best for me to be in the sick room. I can thus direct opinion a good deal, and see that nobody raises suspicion against you."

The speaker hastened off and John returned to his room. He left the door open and sat down where he could be seen and found if wanted. Cool as he was, he was somewhat stirred up by the latest developments. Lighting a cigar he smoked and meditated:

"I have seen Western 'bad men,' so called, in my day, but this sleek and fair-spoken Eastern magnate comes pretty near to taking the trophy for unadulterated rascality. He tried to poison me. My sudden freak of changing the glasses beat him out and made Jones an innocent victim. Manchester is in hot water, but he plays his part with consummate skill. I could rather admire him if he hadn't done deeds in the past that cry to me for vengeance."

Half an hour passed. John kept his place, waiting for developments. He was not disappointed in waiting.

Presently the door of Jones's room opened and Otis Manchester came out. He started along the hall and seemed bound on some errand that demanded haste, but he caught sight of John and appeared to change his mind. He hastened into the room.

"Are you here?" he asked, huskily.

"Right here," replied the sport. "How is Jones?"

"Almost gone."

"What's the matter with him? Is it really poison? If so, what sort of poison? Tell me all about it."

"He is poisoned; no doubt of that. The doctors are working over him, but are hopeless. He suffers much, but bears it manfully. It is a touching sight to see Mabel's distress. She does her part with zeal, and is really of greatest possible value in this awful crisis—she could not be more devoted if she were Jones's sister. The doctors have tried every device and antidote, but it is useless. Jones will not survive the night."

"Now, John, a word to you. The doctors claim that it is more than accidental poisoning, and they speak much of your duel with him—one of them was at the duel, you know. They seem to feel that you hold a grudge against the sick man, and one of them suggests that you be arrested."

"That wouldn't save Jones."

"You take it with your great courage, but the situation is serious. You would have to fight all of Jones's money, and his influential friends, so you ought to avoid arrest."

Otis was not so good an actor as his sire, and Williamson felt sure the son was working up to some definite point.

"What would you suggest?"

"The West is large; there is ample room there to hide."

"Piles of it."

"Well, it seems to me, John, that it would be well for you to act accordingly. Jones is very rich, and he has about all of the City of New York to help him. Lawyers, doctors, ministers, politicians—ay, the highest officials in this state would side with him because he is who he is. Now, John, why wouldn't it be well for you to go West for a while and wait for this to blow over?—to lie low? You can get a sail-boat to take you secretly to New York, and before anybody knew you had gone you could be well on your way to the West."

Williamson looked thoughtful and took three steady puffs at his cigar before he replied.

"Wouldn't it look like guilt for me to go thus?"

"Ah! but you could wait for it to blow over, and then return."

"About how long does it take for a murder to blow over?" calmly inquired the Western man.

CHAPTER XXX.

A WARNING FROM NEW YORK.

The dry, practical question upset Otis not a little, but he answered:

"Well, it's like this: If you stay you will have no show at all. Go West! Hide there! Beat them all out!"

"I appreciate your advice at its full value, but I think I will have breakfast with the family in the morning," decided John. "I am not going to run away. To do so would be to raise the suggestion of positive guilt. No; I shall stay and see this thing out!"

"Stay? Why, you don't mean it? You will be arrested and charged with murder. Can you prove your innocence?"

"Never mind, Otis, my boy; never mind. It isn't my way to run, and I don't think I will begin a new plan of action. Thank you for your good will; thank you very much. Here's my hand, old boy!"

Young Manchester looked decidedly disappointed, but rallied to the emergency.

"Just as you say, of course. I would do all possible to get you off, but, if you think best not to go, I will see that you have a good lawyer at your trial."

And, shaking John's hand, Otis hastened away—perhaps to finish his errand. The man from Oklahoma smiled grimly.

"The gloved touch of the judge is visible in this," he added. "It was Manchester speaking through his son. A fine old scheme, judge! Now that you have a murder affair on your hands, you want me to run away to help you out! A nice plot, but it will not work."

Despite his decision to keep awake through the night, the sport succumbed to sleep, and went into unconsciousness sitting in his chair.

It was morning when he woke. Silence was over the house, and he had no clue to the situation. The door of Jones's room was closed, and John knew not what was going on in there.

He walked out into the hall and paused by the door. All was silence within. What did it mean? Was Verplanck dead?

Returning to his own room, John waited again, and, after half an hour, there were signs of life. The doctor who had officiated at the duel came softly out of the sick room.

The sport went promptly toward him.

"What's the news?" he asked.

"Jones is sleeping quietly."

"But I was told that you did not expect him to survive the night?"

"We did not expect it. He has been a mighty sick man; he is all of that now. I'm not going to hazard a prediction, but, for the first time, we see a ray of hope. Possibly he will pull through."

"What is the trouble?"

"Poison, beyond a doubt. But how administered no one has tried to make a serious guess. He may have eaten something that had something injurious in it, and it may have dropped in by some mischance long before the goods ever came into this house. We fail to identify the poison, so we suspect that it was in some foreign-bought article of food."

All this the doctor said, looking frankly at his companion, and, as the sport saw that there was no suspicion in his manner, he blessed his hard common-sense in rejecting the sinister advice that had been given to him by the Manchesters.

"Well, doctor, let me know if I can give any aid."

"So I will, thank you. That's the right spirit. No grudge borne on account of the duel, eh?" and the doctor smiled.

"Not a bit; not a remnant!"

"That's the manly way. Well, I am off for a bit of sleep. Good-morning!"

The doctor went his way, and John returned to his room.

"Well," he mused, "I think I will not flee to the heart of the Rocky Mountains just yet; and, as sleep seems to be the order of the morning, I won't be outdone by them."

He flung himself on the bed and passed two hours more in peaceful rest. When he awoke there was a stir in the house, and he was informed by a servant that the judge was just going to breakfast, so John joined the judge.

Manchester had not lost his effrontery or his nerve. He was as bluff and apparently as frank as ever. He gave no hope from the sick room, and even spoke of Verplanck's funeral arrangements, but admitted that the sick man still lived, and expressed the best wishes for him.

By midday the doctors spoke more hopefully of their case, and still more so at three o'clock with a strengthening of confidence in Jones's ultimate recovery. A messenger boy, at that hour, brought a despatch to Williamson.

"I think you had better come up here at once," it read.

Dated at New York, it was signed "P." It was an agreed-upon signal.

"It is Lois Austin's warning that Pontiac is in danger. What am I to do? Dare I leave here now?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RACE-HORSE.

He thought it all over, and then made his decision.

"I'll go," he decided. "Not on the sly."

but openly. Manchester shall know of my departure, and so shall the doctor. Yes, and I'll leave my address for them all."

The plan was adopted. He happened to see the physician first, and, under the pretense that he thought he might be needed, gave that gentleman his card. Then he did the same thing to Manchester.

The judge looked puzzled by the decision, and his manner was undecided to the end. John rightly suspected that he was in doubt as to whether the Western man intended to flee the country or not.

He gained no light, and was allowed but little time to meditate on the subject. Hurrying matters, Williamson was soon ready, and off he started for the depot.

On the way he met Davey Smith, the fisherman, who asked in his bluff way where his companion was going.

"To New York," John answered.

"Let me take you up in my sailboat," suggested the fisherman.

"Davey, you are too slow."

"Not a bit of it. With this stiff breeze it's jest right ter make us spin? Then the breeze will do you a world o' good."

It was an alluring bait, and John yielded, and they were soon spinning along northward. The fisherman knew how to handle the craft, and even the passenger could not complain of their rate of speed, so in due time the craft drew near the point of Governor's Island. Before then they had discovered a small steamer moving ahead of them under the tow of a tug, and the fisherman had pronounced it a disabled sea-going craft.

He finally learned more.

"Say, I know that vessel," he exclaimed.

"It's the Dancing Jane, and old Teddy Waters is captain—a rough old chap who can make your blood curdle when he gets mad at his crew. He seems ter hev' been out to sea, broke some part o' his machinery and come back. Say," he continued, "do you know I don't believe old Teddy is as honest as he might be. He's been down our way lately, an' sence you come around. Now I think of it, 'twas the same night that Lew Austin, the jockey, was killed. Teddy come around just before dark, and lay to off the coast. He was still there when I went up toward the track."

"Then Teddy and the Dancing Jane must have been there when Lew was killed. He now will stop along the river somewhere, won't he?"

"Yes. Along nigh where I shall land you, probably. He has a regular place, an' so do I, as a rule. I guess you won't have much difficulty in seein' Teddy, ef you think it'll pay, but he's that contrary that he might not tell you a thing, no matter what he knew."

"If I have time I will take the risk. A detective can't miss any chance, you know, and that's my line of business now. Can you keep him in sight, see where he does tie up, and then notify me later on?"

"Yes. I'll stay where I land you until mornin' ef you say so. I have a friend whose craft lays in there, an' he'll give me a chance ter sleep on board. I'll show you the vessel, an' you kin find me there ef you come."

John was soon on the city streets again, and started at once for the Thirteenth Ward. It was best to visit Pontiac's quarters immediately, he thought, so he took a car to that point.

At the stable he found Andy Dickman standing in the door. The liveryman's face lighted up at sight of him.

"Just in time," he exclaimed. "They have spotted Pontiac."

"How do you know?"

"All from that trump girl, Lois. She has been around here in boy's clothes, an' sorter seein' all that has gone on. She has seen spies, an' made out that Pontiac was traced."

"Have you formed any plan?"

"Yes. I have been to work on the horse an' painted him up in rather a scientific manner. I'm no slouch at that. Why, I painted a rank ringer once, so he went on the trottin' circuit an' raked in a pile o' money. Not an honest thing to do, but that was when I was younger; an' now I have painted Pontiac so his own

mother wouldn't know him. The only trouble is that blamed cropped tail o' his. Now, this is my idee—to put a boy on Pontiac's back, as if he was takin' him out fer exercise, an' let him try to sneak the racer through."

"Not good. Pontiac would show that he was a racer. But, why not attach him to a cab, just as if he were a bona fide inmate of your stable, and let me drive him out?"

"Jingo! That's another idea!" exclaimed Andy; "but I don't doubt that there are eyes on the stable all the while. Still, there must be something done, an' ter be frank, I want you ter be the one to do it."

"I'm just the man for the job. It is nearly dark. When that time is fully reached, put Pontiac into the cab."

"He's a race-horse. Will he work in a cab?"

"I've heard Lew Austin say the horse was a kind driver."

"Good! Then we will try it, an' so let us prepare at once."

It was done, and not only was Pontiac fitted out, but John donned a suit of clothes that belonged to a stableman, so looked very like the typical driver. By dark all was completed, and, with the racer standing meekly in the shafts, it only remained to try the venture.

"All ready, Andy? Then open the stable doors!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

FOLLOWED TO STRANGE QUARTERS.

Andy pushed the doors back and the cab rolled out of the stables.

To all outward appearances the sport was precisely what he seemed—a very commonplace cab-driver, and he turned the obedient racer's head toward the west and moved on.

Andy had made arrangements for Pontiac to be quartered in another stable, if he could be taken there successfully, and John had due directions and a card to introduce him.

All went well until the nearest corner was reached, but, so sure was the driver of interruption, it was no shock when, at that point, a seedy-looking person suddenly advanced from the pavement.

"Hold on!" he directed.

Williamson slowed up a little but did not stop.

"This cab is engaged," he replied.

"I want to speak with you," somewhat peremptorily replied the man.

John, discovering that nobody else was in sight, pulled up promptly.

"Do it quick, then! I must get to the Morton House as soon as possible."

"You are going just the way I want to go. Take me over to the Bowery, and it will save me from tramping, and I'll give you fifty cents. What do you say?"

It looked as if John had a man seedy in pocket and ambition, as well as in dress, yet he did not doubt that he had one of the spies with him, but that did not prevent his agreeing.

"Get inside," he directed.

"I'll ride with you."

Without waiting for refusal the man mounted to the box, much to Williamson's disgust. The stranger thus had a full view of the painted horse, and it was dangerous. As they started the man turned and waved his hand to somebody, and John did not doubt that it was another man on guard. His fare became interested in the horse at once.

"Do you work for Andy Dickman?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Isn't it unusual for the old Thirteenth Ward to turn out cropped-tail horses?" and the questioner looked sharply at Pontiac.

"I never drove one before, but this is an exceptional case. Old Tom—that's my horse—got his tail caught as he stood in his stall and pulled out so much of it that we decided to dock what was left."

"Oh!"

It was an absent reply, and the passenger still looked sharply at Pontiac. John knew he was either suspicious or anxious not to make any slip, but he said no more

for some time. Pontiac could not have behaved better. He jogged along in dreamy fashion befitting a horse whose ribs showed so plainly, all of which was lucky. John took care not to arouse his ambition.

"Do you board any horses at Andy's?" presently inquired the fare.

"When we can get any, but there ain't so many rich men's horses in the Thirteenth Ward as up-town. When I was up there I used to see more of that sort than any other. Rich men can afford such things, you know, and—"

John had set out to out-talk the suspicion, and he did not stop until he had delivered quite a dissertation on horses and rich men. By that time the Bowery was reached, and, just as he was wondering how he was to get rid of his man, there was another hail from the sidewalk. This time the challenger was a tall, imperious-looking man, whose appearance was wholly official.

"Where are you going, Alf?" he demanded.

"Pull up!" directed the passenger; then, raising his voice, he added, apologetically: "I was coming to see you, sir, but I got a chance to ride and I did it."

"Hump yourself down here. You are late now, and I want to finish the job up. I have seen Jones's man, and we are to nab the horse at once. We want to hustle over to Andy's."

John's late passenger was on the pavement, and now he looked very much upset. He looked first at his superior and then at John, and plainly wanted to shut off the speech, but he did not dare to do it.

"Never mind the fare," spoke John, in a somewhat low tone, and then he spoke gently to Pontiac, and moved off.

Even then he knew he was not safe. The second man had far more intelligence than the first, and if he learned that the rig came from Andy Dickman's stable, and noticed that the horse had a cropped tail, he was not likely to let the matter go without investigation. So John proceeded with some anxiety, but the dreaded hail did not come, and he was soon out of danger.

A look behind showed him no sign of the enemy, so he changed his course and drove to the second stable—that to which Andy had directed him. The keeper of that place pleased the sport, and in a short time Pontiac was duly installed and again safe for a time.

After some delay Williamson left the stable and was again his own man. He would have gone to see Lois, but the hour was no longer early, and he was not properly attired, so he sent a message, instead, telling her that Pontiac was changed, and then walked to the Bowery and made arrangements to get different garments.

He determined to appear like the typical New Yorker, as far as possible, so he purchased clothes to attain that result, including a tall hat and a lightweight overcoat, which was not amiss in a cool breeze that had sprung up, and would be useful later on, also.

Next he strolled around to the hotel where he had told the people around the race-track he would stop, but, as the time for retiring did not seem to him to have come, he decided to ride down-town on the elevated road and see Davey Smith. The disabled steamer was not forgotten, and he wanted to see Captain Teddy as soon as possible.

Using the Third Avenue line he alighted at the City Hall station and walked diagonally toward the East River. For a time it was not a lively vicinity that he saw, and he was not yet out of the quiet part when he caught sight of a man walking along ahead of him. Something familiar about the man at once impressed him. He quickened his steps and cut down the lead enough so that discovery followed.

"Tommy Deegan, by Jove! Now, what is he doing here?"

It was not easy to determine. Tommy had evidently been too much scared to venture back near the race-course, and he had clung to New York. It had not made him any the more respectable of appear-

ance, and he was fast drifting into Dickey Spicer's lamentable condition of exterior. Tommy's present course was the same as that of the other traveler, so John kept watch of him and followed quietly.

Finally the East River was neared, and John looked for some change of route. There was none. The tout walked straight across the street to the pier nearest at hand, and then to the gang-plank of a small steamer.

"Wonder if the fellow is going to flee the country?"

Williamson stopped short and surveyed the scene. Tommy had disappeared on board with the air of a man who knows he will not be rebuffed, and that was the last of him.

"I'm no sailor," pursued John, "but I know that craft isn't big enough for an Atlantic crosser. It's small, and seems about the right size for a coast-wise craft—say, by thunder!"

He broke off suddenly, ran his gaze more critically over the vessel, and then exclaimed:

"Shoot me if it isn't the Dancing Jane!"

It was Captain Teddy's vessel, sure enough, for when the sport had taken fuller survey he had abundant proof of it. He was really astonished by what he saw, for he had never set Tommy down as a seagoing man, and he could not understand why the tout was there; but when he had stood a while longer certain suspicions began to take form.

The Dancing Jane had been anchored off the shore the evening that Lew Austin came to grief; Captain Teddy did not bear a good reputation, and it was believed that Lew had been killed by Tommy Deegan.

Now Tommy had gone to Captain Teddy's craft.

"What does this mean? Is it merely that the two men know each other, or had the captain any connection with the killing of Lew? If he did have, what could it have been?"

The riddle was too much for the man from Oklahoma, so he gave it up and decided to add to his work a little. He wanted to see Davey Smith. As Davey had prophesied, there was not much space between the Dancing Jane and his own quarters, and John saw the vessel where the fisherman was to be, only a few piers distant.

He walked down that way.

He had feared that he might be too late to gain entrance, but it proved that Davey had met an old friend, and he was busy smoking and talking with him down below.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, seeing Williamson; "you are right prompt. Anything new?"

"No. What have you to say?"

"The Dancing Jane is jest where I thought she would be, all broke down in her machinery, and back home fer repairs. You kin keep ter your plan of you wish. Will ye go ter see Captain Teddy?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ROUNDSMAN'S REVELATIONS.

"Come with me," was Williamson's answer.

Davey was not reluctant, and John led the way to the pier. There he explained the latest developments, perplexing the fisherman as much as himself.

"It would be jest like Captain Teddy to have Tommy Deegan for a friend," he admitted; "but ef there is more I can't grasp it now."

"Come and look at the Dancing Jane."

They went, and the steamer was looked over.

"No special stir about her," murmured Davey. "She lays there quiet enough, but we can't see below decks. I s'pose the tout is in there, though. It's a fit place fer him. The Dancin' Jane always did have a piratical look ter me, an' her skipper is jest like her. Well, shall we go on board?"

"Not by any means," declared Williamson. "Matters have reached a stage where we want to be careful. It can't be that Tommy has deliberately planned to leave

the country on this craft, for she has come in by mere chance, but there is something afoot. The tout must have been summoned here as soon as Captain Teddy reached his dock. Why?"

"Give it up!"

"Are you a busy man?"

"Well, I hev' my livin' to make."

"You can make more money in my service than by catching fish. Is it a go?"

"I guess it is. What do ye want?"

"I want you to watch this vessel with catlike caution. I want to know all that happens here, and I can see but one way to do it. It may be nothing will come of it, but to take that view is to lose all chance to know what does occur. I have other things to do, but you can serve me in this if you will, and you'll get well paid."

"Done!"

"Don't leave your post long under any consideration."

"I won't."

"If Tommy comes out and goes away you will lose sight of him, for you can't do two widely diverse things at once. Stay here! If the steamer ceases temporarily to be of interest, it may regain interest later."

"I see."

"Stick to the steamer!"

"I will."

"Keep out of sight—wait, watch. Here is a card. If you think necessary, send a messenger to me. I may not get it right away, but send the message."

"Done!"

John gave money to his ally, and then, after some further delay, which brought no results, left the place. He looked back longingly at the Dancing Jane. She was of interest if Tommy Deegan found her of use to him, and John wanted to get well acquainted with her.

Thinking of the matter as he progressed he was led to wonder what had made the tout leave Bob Travor's, and he mechanically bent his steps that way. When he discovered his course he did not check it, and, as he could also see Andy Dickman's stable, he decided to take a run over to the Thirteenth Ward.

It was late when he arrived there, and even the roysterers were growing very few. Now and then an ill-looking fellow skulked along the sidewalk, but, if any of them lived by violence, even Williamson's lately purchased good clothes did not make them oblivious to the fact that he had a powerful figure—he was not molested.

Andy's stable was quiet and dark. The Western man passed on toward Bob Travor's.

The misnamed hotel showed plenty of light and seemed to be surprisingly lively, and as John drew near he was much impressed by the fact. He observed a roundsman near at hand and decided to speak to him. He went to the official.

"Are they having a night of it over there?" he asked.

"That's a lodging-house," replied the policeman, rather stiffly.

"So the sign says over the door. I have seen the place before, too. Anything wrong there to-night?"

The officer eyed the questioner silently for a moment, and then, impressed, perhaps, by the good clothes thus discovered, he thawed out of his reserve. He gave Williamson a start.

"They've had a tragedy over there to-night," the roundsman explained, stretching out his arm.

"A tragedy? The dickens they have! But I don't suppose that is anything strange in a house run by Bob Travor."

"He will not be responsible for any more tragedies."

"How is that?" asked John, quickly.

"This time it is Bob who has been used roughly. He has kept a rough place, and, though we never could decide that it was positively lawless, there have been men fatally hurt there. Now, it is Bob himself."

"What!" exclaimed the man from Oklahoma. "Do you mean the lodging-house keeper is fatally injured?"

"Bob Travor is dying in his own den," declared the roundsman.

"How did it happen?"

"Stabbed by one of his guests of the night."

"Who?"

"His name was Martin. He is down at the station now."

"And Bob?"

"He is in yonder. When he comes out it will be his last journey, and, I hope, the end of that house."

"Has it come to this?" muttered John.

"The building was once the home of respectability; now it is a house of murder," added the roundsman.

"Officer, I want to go in there. I want to see Bob Travor."

"You? Why?"

"I believe the man has a secret of value to me. I want to try to wrest it from him."

"You never will find a better chance. His spirit has all ebbed away with his blood; he is a craven now, and confession will roll easily from his tongue, if he has anything to confess."

"Show me the way in," eagerly directed the Westerner. "Take me there so that I can solve another tragedy."

The officer looked keenly at his companion. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy him, and he turned quietly.

"Come!" he directed.

Williamson followed. They crossed the street and entered by the door. A patrolman was on guard there, but they passed him, and John was escorted to a small room at one side. There he was directed to remain until the roundsman could see the lodging-house keeper, and see what the chances were. The delay was not great; the officer soon returned.

"You can come to him," he added. "I have broken the ice somewhat, and Bob declares that if he can serve you he will. Of course I shall have to be present."

"I shall be most glad to have you. I want a witness."

The keeper was found stretched on his bed, and Williamson could well believe that he was near his end. He had been big and strong, but he was worse than a child then. He looked up and quickly whispered:

"I'll help ye if I kin. What is it?"

"Mr. Travor," replied John, with equal directness, "you know one Chase Manchester?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember that when he gave up this house, some twenty years ago, and it was taken by Thomas Deegan, you worked in a minor capacity for Deegan?"

"Why, of course. I remember it as if it was but yesterday."

"Now I ask you to recall more. Upstairs there are still two rooms kept in form as they were then. Fix your mind on the most northerly of those two rooms. Do you remember that when Deegan had the house he for some time had a man confined as a prisoner in that room?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ONE STORY IS TOLD.

Bob Travor brightened up perceptibly.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed. "I remember that man."

"You saw him with your own eyes, did you?" continued Williamson.

"I did. It was Deegan who did the takin' care o' him, but Deegan was high-toned in them days, an' the mean work o' the room fell ter me. I seen the man twice; he was only here a few weeks."

"Why was he here?"

"I only know," answered Bob, "that he was in the way of a man who had money, an' he hired Deegan ter take care of him."

"You are sure of this?"

"I'll swear to it. I was knowin' to it all then."

"Who was the man who had him shut up?"

"Chase Manchester."

"Where is Chase Manchester now?"

"He is the same man who is judge o' races down at the track."

"Who was the prisoner of the locked room?"

"His name was Exol Williamson, as near as I could get to it."

Thus far John had been talking for the benefit of the police roundsman, but he now approached more important matters. Leaning forward, he asked, in a subdued voice:

"What became of that unfortunate prisoner?"

"Murdered!"

"By whom?—by whom?" huskily demanded the sport.

"Manchester an' Tom Deegan."

"Are you sure? Think well. You are on the brink of eternity. I am sure you do not wish to do wrong to any man. Do not wrong those you mention, but if this be true, for the sake of the dead do not keep the secret longer. Speak out! Tell the truth, but speak out!" urged the man from Oklahoma, nervously.

"I'll tell all I know. Exol Williamson was kidnapped somewhere down Coney Island way and brought here. Manchester was the cause of it all. He put Deegan in charge of Williamson, an' here the prisoner was held a long time. Then, all o' a sudden, he disappeared."

"But you said he was murdered."

"Listen!" added Bob. "I heard them—Manchester an' Tom—talk it over. They didn't know how ter dispose o' the body, but finally Manchester said they would drown'd the prisoner in the bathtub, an' then take the body ter the river an' throw it in. When it was found an' the autopsy made, it would show he died by drownin'. See?"

"Well—well?"

"Act one. Next, I seen a body carried out o' the house the next night. I can't say it was the prisoner's, but he wasn't never seen again until they found him dead in the river."

"Travor, will you swear to this?"

"Yes."

"Then let it be put in writing. We will ask you to go over the matter again, and recall all you can. It must be put on paper in full, and witnesses must add their names. We want a strictly legal document. Mr. Roundsman, you have heard. Will you help me through?"

"Most willingly, sir. I do not know of this case, but if it has been a secret of twenty years, it is time to divulge it to the world and punish the guilty. We will have a notary in, and have a sworn statement of all."

The plan was carried out, the roundsman doing most of the work. John Williamson was much overcome by the revelation. He had heard no more than he had suspected, but the whole matter was brought home so vividly that it stirred him deeply.

Before they left the room they had the statement desired, and Bob had affixed his name weakly, and witnesses had done their part. The dying lodging-house keeper looked dimly at John.

"I'm glad I've done one good deed. Maybe it will help me where I am goin' next."

When they left him it was their last look at him. He died the morning after.

The remainder of the night was spent by John at his hotel, and his remarkable self-control and good nerves enabled him to sleep soundly when once there. He had made an appointment with the roundsman to be early at Police Headquarters, and there they met at the appointed hour. The object was strictly one of business.

When they had been conducted to the presence of the Superintendent the whole matter was gone over. More was touched upon, too. Williamson made known his belief that Manchester had killed, or been instrumental in killing, Lew Austin, and that affair was fully discussed.

The Westerner asked leave to delay a little in the matter, so as to give himself time to work a little further, but requested that two detectives be sent to the race-course to be within reach whenever he might call for their aid.

The Superintendent had been led to admire the discoveries and cool nerve of the amateur detective, and he promised that all should be done in accordance with this

plan. Two men were detailed and ordered to go at once to the race-course and await orders from Williamson, and then all details were duly settled.

John's next work was at Manchester's, but he would not go without seeing Lois. He called there as soon as he could get away, and the first thing done was to tell of the success of saving Pontiac.

The Westerner said nothing of the money he had found in Tommy Deegan's room, but it was his purpose to give it to Lois ultimately, as he was convinced that it belonged to her by right.

"Now," he finally remarked, "I am going to see the arch plotter and fight this thing out."

"He is rich and powerful. He must be a dangerous man."

"So he is."

"Look well to your safety," cautioned Lois.

"I shall beat Chase out."

"And poor Lew! Do you think his death will ever be avenged?"

"I propose to solve the mystery fully."

"Can I go down and help you?"

"Impossible! You would be a good helper, but you must not risk it. Stay here—wait! All will come out well."

"Go, and my blessing go with you!"

"Your voice is Lew's voice, and it will spur me on. Be of good cheer! Justice will triumph and the wicked be punished."

Williamson spoke with all the more fervor because he could see the earnest, prayerful look in her eyes, and he realized that she looked to him to avenge her brother. Brave and strong as she was, he was only a girl, and she had not the opportunities to sift the tragedy that a man had. John had become the champion of her cause, and she turned to him for help in all things.

He left the house in a subdued frame of mind, but this did not prevent him from remaining as zealous as ever.

He next went to the docks to see how Davey Smith was progressing with the Dancing Jane. He found the steamer at her pier and the fisherman on guard.

"Nothin' new," Davey reported. "There is the usual life on board, but I ain't seen Tommy Deegan."

"Can he have left the steamer?"

"Not by any means. I'm here ter watch."

"You are doing nobly. Keep it up. What are your further impressions of the Dancing Jane?"

"Dark an' dubersome, mister. I don't know the ins an' outs of it, but I am more than ever convinced that there is somethin' crooked about that craft. Captain Teddy is dead set on keepin' kids from playin' near his old vessel, an' he looks worried an' plratcal."

"Don't let up on your watch, Davey. Urgent business calls me elsewhere, but I want to feel sure this point is well covered."

"It will be, by gum!" declared the fisherman.

"Good! I believe you, and now I can go feeling secure. Hang to your position and it will bring you cash. Hang to it, for it means much."

Thus they parted, and John took his way southward. The events of the day had consumed a good deal of time, and he saw that he would not reach the race-course until after the races had begun. This was not a matter of importance, though, with affairs as they now were; he wanted to be near the central point and lose nothing of what was going on there.

When he reached his destination and alighted from the train, almost the first person he saw was Dickey Spicer. The tramp's face beamed with pleasure, and he advanced to greet his associate.

"Glad ter see ye," he exclaimed. "Didn't know but you had died o' some malevolent epidemic in the wicked city. Lemme see, how long hev' you been gone?"

Dickey pulled out his almanac and studied it with his customary gravity.

"I have been asleep fer a few weeks," he added. "Kin you tell me what year it is now?"

"Fourteen hundred and ninety-two," grimly answered Williamson

"I suspected it. The minute I set eyes onter you I said ter myself, 'That's Columbus!' How be you, Christopher? Lookin' hale an' hearty, I see. I guess you've discovered America just in time. The almanac says the sign is in the feet, an' that makes the show good fer walkin'. How do you like our stern an' rockbound coast, anyhow?"

"No nonsense, Richard. What is the news?"

"Boss," replied Dickey, with enthusiasm, "there's piles of it."

"I want it all, but the first call relates to an old friend of mine. Is Verplanck Jones dead or alive?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

JOHN IS WANTED.

Dickey chuckled as if the question amused him a good deal.

"Jones is still alive," he replied. "He is bracin' up a good bit, I am told, an' is likely ter live to bless the Jones family a good many years. Lucky, ain't it? Think of his dyin' an' leavin' all o' the Joneses in America ter weep fer him!"

"Is he out of bed?" pursued Williamson.

"Don't think so. My information is that he's pretty weak, an' has ter stick close ter bed."

"He will pull through, no doubt. Is there more?"

"Boss, I wanted ter see ye about it," answered Dickey, with seriousness unusual to him. "What I know ain't much; what I guess would fill my almanac full with interestin' statistics. I guess the sign is so that you're in danger—must be in the legs, which is an indication you want ter be ready ter run."

"Speak out, man; speak out."

"The long an' short of it is this. Chase Manchester has been busy as the north wind. He has been much with Leighton Crane, the detective, who has the Lew Austin case, an' likewise with other officers. Now, I can't prove nothin', nor tell nothin', but it sticks in my head that you want ter look out. The judge has some bug in his head—look a good lot out!"

"I thank you for the warning, and I'll try to heed it. Continue to keep your eyes open, and if you learn anything, come to me. I am going boldly to Manchester's again, poison or no poison, and if he lets me stay, there is likely to be some fun in that mansion."

"Look out!" warned Dickey. "There's murder afoot, an' don't you doubt it. Look out fer the judge!"

This solemn caution rang in John's head when he took his way toward the track and prepared to enter. He well knew that matters were approaching a crisis, and that Chase Manchester was capable of anything, but he relied upon his strength and caution to frustrate any blow that might be aimed at his life.

Once inside the gates he looked around to see who of his resident associates were there. Otis was not among the bookmakers, but the elder Manchester presided over the races, with his associates, with all of his usual calmness.

The sport did not succeed in getting as much interested as was his habit in the events of the day. To kill time he decided to bet, but when he lost on the first two events he gave it up, and his big voice did not go booming, that day, when some long, lean nag shot arrow-like past the judges' stand.

He planned to meet Manchester immediately after the close of the races and, by talking with him, learn if he would be welcome at the mansion, but, by some mischance, he missed the judge. There was nothing left for him to do but abandon his plan or go to the house alone.

He went alone.

At the door a servant was the first to meet him, and the man from Oklahoma greeted him buoyantly and passed on. In the main hall he encountered Mabel. He bowed and smiled his most beaming smile.

"Hallo, Miss Manchester!" was his cheerful greeting.

Mabel paused, looked at him for a moment in indecision, and then, with a trace of triumph in her face, pointedly replied:

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Jones!"

"Eh?"

"I am the wife of Mr. Verplanck Jones."

"The dickens you are!" exclaimed Williamson.

"Yes."

"Why, I didn't get your cards."

"We were married this morning. I wished to nurse him during his illness, so the marriage was decided upon. I am Mrs. Jones."

"Well, now, that's romantic!" exclaimed John, with an air of enthusiasm. "It really breaks up the monotony of life a good deal. I wish I had been here, for I could have added my blessing with the others. Permit me, now, to wish you and Jones much joy."

Mabel's face fell. She had relaxed her suddenly-conceived hatred of the Western man for the sole purpose of enjoying his dismay, and dismay had not come. It was a severe set-back to her, and she sought for another way to humiliate him.

"I choose those whose good wishes I accept," she loftily answered. "Your wishes, good or bad, are of no consequence to me."

With this retort she swept away, and John was left alone. He was not abashed by the latest rebuff, and he only shook his head.

"Poor Jones! The poison was bad enough, but he has a worse trouble on his hands now. Nothing but a divorce will cure it. Cat's-paw from the beginning, he has now a load to carry that will break him down in his youth. Poor Jones!"

With this the speaker walked into the parlor and found Judge Manchester reading a newspaper. It was a question in John's mind how he would be received by the master of the house, but he was soon shown. Chase looked up from the paper and then rose with a smile of welcome.

"Ah, John!" he exclaimed, "so you are with us again. I was thinking of you a moment ago and wondering what had become of you."

Williamson pointed to his new clothes.

"I've been seeing the sights of New York a bit. If I am to settle down as an Eastern man I have got to dress like others here. How do I pan out as a swell?"

"You are looking fine. Possibly you'll not be so comfortable as you were, but the new suit shows off your manly figure well. Anything new to report?"

There was a trifle of uneasiness in the question, despite the judge's effort to be at ease, but Williamson made his most reassuring reply and then sat down. They talked pleasantly on minor matters for some time, and John was not less surprised at his own ability to keep up a conversation of the nature with the man he loathed than at the judge's own composure.

Presently they had supper, and with no other companion than Otis, but they were sociable through it all, talk mostly running on the races of the day.

After this the sport walked out briefly, finding his detective aids from New York and bidding them be alert. When he returned to the house he was met by Manchester. The judge looked grave to an extreme.

"I was worried, John," he asserted, "when I first saw your figure in the darkness."

"Why?"

"I have had a caller since you went away."

"Who?"

"A friend of mine, one Stebbins. He told me something, which, if true, is startling."

"What was it?"

"He assures me that the authorities have been seriously considering your case. I knew this to be true, for they called on me to-day, and had a good deal of cheap talk to go through, but I bluffed them. Fact is, they look on you suspiciously.

Providence only knows what they will rake up against you next. They speak of the poisoning case with bitter enmity against you."

"They do, eh?"

"They will have it that you poisoned Jones!"

"Nonsense!"

"So I told them, but they continue obstinate. They would have taken measures to arrest you this morning had I not argued them out of it. More, they hint at something dreadful between you and poor Lew Austin's death. They say you wrongfully claimed the horse Pontiac, and that you may have had further motive for killing Lew."

"Say, those fellows are crazy."

"It is a most unjust suspicion, but maybe you will have to go away for a brief time and let it blow over."

"Do you advise that?"

"Well, you don't want to be arrested."

"Decidedly not."

Satisfaction gleamed briefly in Manchester's face, but he quickly repressed the tell-tale sign.

"Of course you are perfectly innocent, but there is no limit to unjust suspicion—"

There was a knock at the door close to where the men sat.

"I will answer it," added Manchester, breaking off.

He went to the window and looked out on the piazza.

"What's wanted?" he inquired.

"Is that you, Judge Manchester?" came the reply, audible to John.

"Yes," answered the judge.

"I am here on important business. I am an officer from New York. Your help is requested in this matter, but you will please keep still about it. Is John Williamson here?"

Manchester put his hand behind him and made a warning gesture to the man from Oklahoma.

"Mr. Williamson is not here," he asserted.

"When do you expect him?"

"I do not know."

"I will wait for him outside. I only wanted to see him on private business. Kindly pardon me for interrupting you. Good-night, sir."

The man retreated, and then the judge turned again to Williamson. The calm expression was gone from the elder man's face. He looked anxious and startled.

"You are in for it, John!" he cried, in an unsteady voice. "You heard what he said. He's an officer, and he's looking for you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CRISIS.

John Williamson did some quick thinking. He had heard all, and, though he was momentarily upset to find that an officer was thus in search of him, he did not lose his coolness, and his practical common-sense soon asserted itself. His first businesslike thought was that the officer was not a shrewd man to proceed as he was acting. Then it flashed upon him that the officer was no officer at all, and that the whole matter was a trick on the judge's part.

Consequently he kept his place coolly.

"Why did you say I wasn't in?" he replied to Manchester's remark.

"To bluff him off; to save you."

"From what?"

"Arrest."

"Do you think that was his purpose?"

"Most surely. Only for my device you would now be under arrest, charged with murder. Lucky I denied knowledge of you. John, this is terrible. The rumors are but too true. They intend to seize you this very night! They are hovering near, watching like bloodhounds! You are in vital danger. It is terrible!"

Manchester was not calm any longer. He wrung his hands and paced the room wildly. John sat still and smoked slowly and serenely.

"Yes, it is terrible," he admitted.

"Awful! awful!"

"And I am so young, too."

"True, true! Young, rich, strong—why,

you have everything to live for. Now, legal death—a disgraceful death—stares you in the face! And you are innocent of all wrong-doing. Terrible, terrible!"

Manchester continued to pace the room excitedly, and he seemed to be all worked up to a tragic pitch. Just then hasty steps sounded in the hall, and Otis entered hurriedly. He, too, was frustrated.

"Say, father," he cried, "John will be in the hands of the officers in a short time, for they are all about the house—"

Here he seemed to see Williamson for the first time. He broke off, and added:

"Oh! So John is here!"

"Yes. What news is there?" demanded Chase. "Speak out, boy—speak quickly! There is no time to lose! See! Here is the man who has eaten our bread and slept under our roof. We must stand by him! We must save him from a disgraceful death! He is innocent. He must be saved!"

"Men have surrounded the house. I chanced to overhear some of their talk. They think John is not here, but they wait for him outside. See the shrubbery yonder! It holds a man, and there are two more by the big tree. All are here to get John!"

Father and son darted around the room, looking out of first one window and then another, and appearing to be terribly excited. In the meanwhile John Williamson kept his seat and smoked on serenely.

"It seems," he calmly observed, "that they have me surrounded."

"The back side of the house, Otis!" cried the judge. "There is no door there, and they will post no men in that quarter. He can slip out that way and reach the shore before they know of his departure."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Otis. "That can be worked!"

"Your swift sailboat, boy—where is it?"

"Down by the shore."

"Good! You can reach it; you can set sail; you can reach the Jersey coast. John can take a train for the West and give them all the laugh."

"Yes. That will work," assented Otis.

"Now, John!" added the judge, vehemently. "Now is your time."

The man from Oklahoma took a pull at his cigar.

"This reminds me of a night in the Colorado mines," he remarked, retrospectively. "You see, there was a gambler whose name was Tucker—no, I think his name was really Tompkins—he had a good many aliases—and he was arrested and thrown into prison, and—"

"Stop! stop!" exclaimed the judge. "This is no time for idle reminiscences. Do you realize your danger? Do you know that your life is in danger? There are people who think the recent events here very strange and suggestive—"

"And I am one of them!"

The interruption came in a woman's voice, and Mabel swept into the room. She was not agitated, but she fixed her regard upon the man from the West with tragic import.

"I don't know what all this talk is about," she added, forcibly, "for I have heard but a word of it; but I am not to be deceived as to what has occurred here. I am the happy wife of Verplanck Jones, but it is only by a mere chance that it is so. You—you, sir," she stretched out her arm toward John with a true tragic gesture, "you tried to murder Verplanck by putting poison in his claret!"

"Mabel! Mabel!" cried Manchester, reprovingly. "Stop, girl, stop!"

"I will not stop. I know whereof I speak. I saw it all. I saw John Williamson's hand hovering over the glasses! I saw it all! I did not then suspect the truth, for I did not believe him so base and ignoble, but I realize the truth at last! Murderer! Murderer!"

"Stop!" shouted the judge. "I will not hear such wild words. The outside world may accuse our friend, but it is our duty to stand by him. He is my guest—I will stand by him—ay, to the bitter end! No more of this, Mabel—you are excited and thoughtless."

"I am not the only one in this case.

When Verplanck recovers sufficiently to be out of his room he will press the charges; he will accuse John Williamson of trying to murder him by poison! He has said so, and he will not change his purpose—"

Manchester hastened forward, took his daughter by the arm and shoved her out of the room.

"Why need she add to this terrible dilemma?" he lamented. "We had enough to contend with before. Don't heed this, John; she is excited. Of course I can't control Jones, and he has said he will have you arrested, but that danger is far off. Let us look only at the present. Otis, are you sure there is escape by the rear?"

"Yes."

"Then it shall be that way!"

The man from Oklahoma was not sure that it would be that way. He recognized a concerted effort on the part of the family to drive him back to the West. The judge knew full well that he would make a dangerous enemy, and he dared not forbid him the house, and dared not anger him in any way, but if he could be scared back to Oklahoma the desired result would be accomplished. The whole family had been enlisted in the scheme, and they were playing their cards accordingly.

But John did not believe this was all. Matters had reached a point where something definite must be done by Manchester to get rid of his obnoxious guest, and, while John kept his seat and smoked calmly, he watched everything closely.

Back of all this plotting to scare him he read in Manchester's face a resolution that was not to be treated lightly. To himself the Westerner thought:

"He is bound to clear me out this night, and, if he can do it in no other manner, he will try to kill me. There is murder in his mind!"

Father and son continued their vehement conversation.

"There is no time to lose," declared Otis.

"Right!" asserted Chase. "If there is delay John will be a victim before another day dawns. You and he must hasten to the boat, set the sail, and get away immediately. Make for the Jersey shore. It is the one hope."

"I can see one of the watchers by the tree," exclaimed Otis, looking out of the window.

"Go by the rear! Go now! Go, go, go! It is madness to delay, for arrest will speedily follow. This is a case of life or death. Be off at once. John, are you all ready?"

"Judge," coolly replied John, "I am going to remain right here!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MASK THROWN OFF.

Silence followed the announcement, and John's voice was something like an icy breath to the other men. To accomplish their ends, they had seemed to work themselves up to a tremendous pitch of excitement, and the contrast when the man from the West put in his quiet decision was remarkable and startling.

Chase Manchester stopped short and stared hard at the stubborn guest. He really appeared dumfounded with surprise, but presently his expression changed enough to reveal the bitter disappointment—and something more—that came to him.

"You will stay?" he echoed.

"Right here," replied Williamson.

"And meet arrest?"

"If it comes—yes."

"It will come, of course. How can you doubt it, with so much evidence? Have we not seen that the foe is at our door? They wait to seize you—to bear you to a prison cell; to put you on trial for murder!"

"Then they will have to come," responded John. "I am not guilty of any crime, and I am not going to run away like a cowardly coyote. If they arrest me I will meet trial. I am not to be put to death legally without a trial, and I am not afraid of that trial. I refuse to flee to the West. I shall remain right here."

In a cool, even tone he made his decision,

and there was that in it that left no doubt of its firmness and sincerity. When he said he was not to be scared away he meant it.

"This is madness," protested the judge.

"Sheer madness!" echoed Otis.

"It is a style I often deal in," responded John, quietly. "The public brands the runaway with the stigma of guilt. I shall not be branded in that way. I am ready to fight it out."

"Recollect that the officers are at the door," urged the judge.

"If they call for me again, tell them to come in. Say to them that I have business with them."

Chase Manchester had calmed down a good deal, considering his late tremendous excitement over John's danger. He only looked deeply disappointed and sullen now. He glared hostilely at the cause of his perturbation.

"So you insist upon staying to disgrace me, do you?" he bitterly proceeded.

"How will it do that?"

"I do not want an accused murderer arrested in my house."

"So you think it would disgrace you, do you?"

"Just what I do think. I have taken you under my roof and made a home for you. My friends have decried the choice of husband my daughter made, and assured me that I would lose my prestige in society by having you around, but I stuck to you. Now you reward me by compelling me to see the newspapers proclaim that a murderer was arrested in my house!"

"Judge, you don't take kindly to murderers, do you?"

"No, nor to you."

"Then why the tremendous interest you felt in me ten minutes ago?"

"You have proved an ingrate!" cried the judge. "I have stood by you and tried to make something of you, but it has been useless. You are nothing but a Western boor, and my interest has ended!"

It was a hot speech, but Williamson remained outwardly unruffled.

"As long as we have arrived at this point," he answered, "we may as well end it all right here. This is the best way to do it."

He rose for the first time, stepped to the window, raised his voice, and distinctly announced to the men skulking behind the shrubbery:

"John Williamson is here! Come and take him! Come in!"

"Stop! stop!" shouted the judge.

"What?"

"I forbid you to say another word!"

"Oh! but you want to be rid of my presence."

"Not in that way."

"It is the best way to proceed. I don't want to be dreading a phantom danger; I prefer to have it real." Then, raising his voice once more, he added: "Come in, men!"

Manchester sprang forward and caught his arm.

"No more of that!" hissed the infuriated master of the house. "I have had enough of your villainy. Don't dare to call again."

"Dare?" repeated John. "Dare? What would you do?"

"I would revenge the insults I have suffered at your hands. Oh! you cool, sneering scoundrel! don't think you can longer bully me in my own house! You have reached the end of your rope. I have found your presence here like a plague to me. I have tried to get rid of you quietly, but your stupidity and insensibility to what would touch anybody else's pride have prevented! You clod! you clod!"

Manchester was excited again, and this time it was no pretense. His face blazed with fury, and John redoubled his vigilance. Well did he know there was dark thought in his companion's mind.

"The clod is a quiet kind of a thing," he admitted, coolly, "but the time always comes that it shows life. It isn't so sleepy as it looks—and maybe I have seen further into your methods than you think."

"Once more I mention the back window and the boat by the shore. Will you

go? Will you relieve us of your accursed presence?"

"Judge, I am going to stay by you. I am not to be driven to the West. Out of your house I will gladly go, but not out of your life. I stay; I welcome investigation; I defy you to press any charges against me. Do you think I have been deceived in you? Do you believe I did not know you to be my deadly enemy? Do you think your heart was a locked book to me? No! I knew all; I know all now. You are my foe! Good! I like you better that way. Let us fight it out. Let us call in the men by the shrubbery. Let me raise my voice and call—"

"Not in this world!"

Manchester was stung to madness, and he lost all sense of prudence and policy. Almost panting the words, he ran his hand under his coat.

It came out holding a knife. He made a swift, deadly thrust at the man from Oklahoma.

Williamson was experienced, alert and quick, but he barely escaped the stroke. Leaping back, he suffered no more than a gash in his sleeve, but the judge was not to be frustrated so easily. He followed madly, his knife raised for another blow.

"Die!" he hissed. "Die, you scoundrel!"

It was a time when the coolness of the Western man was all-important. With a rapid motion his hand flashed to his hip-pocket and came out holding a revolver. He turned it upon Manchester.

"Stop!" he solemnly exclaimed. "I don't want to do you harm, but you must keep off. Stop!"

The caution would have been useless, for the judge was too much enraged to heed his danger, but Otis caught his arm and held him back. The expression of the younger Manchester told that he had not expected anything so radical as that. He was startled and dismayed.

"No, no!" he feverishly exclaimed.

"Don't do it."

"I'll kill him! I'll end his—"

"Not this evening!"

The interruption came in another voice, and Manchester was seized from behind. He shot a furious glance over his shoulder and saw new-comers in the room—official-looking men, but certainly not the counterfeits who had skulked in the bushes. They were John's aids from New York.

"Let there be no killing here!" exclaimed one of them.

The judge was not to be quieted by the fresh turn of affairs, but he had to deal with those who knew how to meet such emergencies. Handcuffs were promptly slipped upon his wrists.

Otis was deeply moved by the events of the hour, and especially by the final catastrophe. He was not of noble nature, but, like Mabel, he was ignorant of his father's crimes, and though he was evil enough for small misdemeanors, he had not the villainy or nerve to take the present case with coolness.

"I protest against this!" he declared. "You have no right to iron him. At the best it is only a personal quarrel."

"It is more, far more!" retorted the man from the West. "Judge Manchester is arrested now, as he should have been many years ago. I accuse him of murdering my father, Exol Williamson!"

The judge grew suddenly calm, chilled into the mood. He looked at his accuser strangely.

"You—you—"

He stammered and stopped, and John finished for him.

"I know all," he added, solemnly. "I have known all for some time. I came under your roof ignorant of the terrible drama of the past. You knew who I was—you knew I was the son of your victim of long ago. You have tried to get rid of me more than once, but all in vain. I remained here, and I gained light on the past. I accuse you of slaying my father!"

"No, no!" cried Otis. "Not that—surely not that!"

Chase Manchester staggered and seemed about to fall. He was assisted to a chair, and one of the officers went to find water for him to drink. He lay with eyes closed.

and he was temporarily free from observation. The remaining officers spoke with John and Otis.

Suddenly there was a rustling sound at one side. They turned just in time to see Manchester go bounding out of the window and across the piazza.

"Pursue!" shouted the leading officer.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A STUNNING SURPRISE AND A HUZZA.

Twenty-four hours later. The lamps were burning dully down by the river-front, and a fog made each available point a dripping-post. A dark, unpleasant, rain-threatening night it was for the great city, and few persons were abroad.

Down a side street came several men. All were in plain clothes, but several of the party had an official look, and only one seemed positively a private citizen. That one was John Williamson.

They conversed as they walked.

"We want to get this work off our hands as soon as possible," remarked one of the party. "I cannot see how anything good can come of it, and I want to renew the search for Chase Manchester."

"He may be in Ohio by this time," suggested another.

"Not with those irons on his wrists."

"I have before told you," interrupted Williamson, "that I am not sure but he could get rid of them. He had large wrists and small hands, and that means a good deal. He may have slipped off the irons."

"Anyhow, we will run him down. He shall not long escape us."

"No, and we want to get about it. I am not satisfied, Williamson, with our decision to come down here and investigate an old coastwise steamer for you."

"Wait until we see the steamer," advised the sport. "It means something that work is being so pressed on board. Captain Teddy carries no perishable cargo, yet he has a day-force and a night-force at work to repair the Dancing Jane. I can't help thinking that means something. Why, we may even find Judge Manchester aboard the craft."

"Not much! It would be too good luck."

"Well, we'll see."

The errand of the party was plain. When the judge leaped out of the window of his mansion he had evaded pursuit and made good his escape. He had not yet been found, though there was a well-defined rumor that he had been seen in New York, and the search was warm there. Dickey Spicer had been added to the watchers of the steamer Dancing Jane, and as both he and Davey reported prodigious activity on board the vessel, Williamson had prevailed upon his aids to go there with him. He could not say that he expected anything from it, but if Tommy Deegan made it his home, as he was known to be doing, it was possible that the runaway judge was there.

He had advanced this idea until the detectives had consented to search the Dancing Jane.

When they neared the pier they found Dickey Spicer on guard. He came out of a recess and shook himself.

"John," he remarked, in a wheezy voice, "my almanac says we are ter have a long, dry spell. This is probably the beginnin' of it, an' I feel as ef I'd been used fer a sponge. Ef you don't mind I'll sign the temperance pledge again, an' then accept enough money fer a drink."

The request was unheeded.

"Is there anything new from the - mer?" asked his employer.

"No. It's all old—jest the thump, rump, thump, o' them hammers on the disabled machinery. It is drefful to a disciple o' rest—"

"Come!" Williamson directed, briskly.

He and the detectives passed on, leaving Dickey alone, almanac in hand, and decidedly downcast.

"The sign can't be right," muttered Dickey. "Ef this is the way faithful service is rewarded, I'll desert an' spend the next ten years in peaceful sleep."

With the man from Oklahoma at the

front, the detective detail marched on board the Dancing Jane. Only two men were on deck, for, as the damage to the craft was confined to the machinery, the laborers were all down there, but the sound of their hammers was plain. The deck-hands were given but little attention, and the invaders went quickly below, entering the main cabin.

John was at the front, and, as he reached the foot of the stairs, he saw a man leap up from a chair and dart into a stateroom. He left two men behind him, and all but one had been readily recognized by Williamson.

One of those who remained was Tommy Deegan—he who had fled was Chase Manchester.

"Victory!" cried the leader. "The judge is here! Forward!"

The two men in the cabin had leaped to their feet, but John rushed past them. He saw the stateroom door closing, and bounded to that point just in time to prevent the accomplishment of the purpose. He flung the door open and stood face to face with the judge.

A revolver glistened in the fugitive's hand, and he turned it upon his pursuer.

"This is for you!" he cried.

He pulled the trigger. The weapon was discharged, but John had deftly knocked the barrel upward and the bullet was harmlessly imbedded in the woodwork above. He gave his foe no time to try again, but wrested the revolver away. The officers pressed forward, and this time Manchester was ironed so carefully that there was no fear of his making his escape.

There was general exultation over the capture, but the judge looked at John with glittering eyes.

"I wish I could have foreseen this," he exclaimed.

"If you had I should never have been safe in your house, I can well believe."

"Yes, I would have killed you!"

"I believe it! That is your way!"

"Take the prisoner ashore," directed the detective leader.

"Wait!" added John. "We want Tommy Deegan, too, and we want to know the secret of this vessel. Search every stateroom!"

At this the third man in the cabin began to protest loudly, stating that he was the captain, and objected to having his vessel so upset; but he was unheeded. One by one the staterooms were looked to, and a remarkable discovery soon followed. In one of them a man was found bound hand and foot, and gagged so as to prevent any outcry. He was released and carried out into the cabin, where John had his first sight of the victim.

A cry escaped the Westerner's lips. He rushed forward to the late-bound man.

"Alive, alive!" he shouted, and clasped the rescued captive in his arms.

"What's all this?" demanded one of the detectives.

"Alive, alive!" repeated Williamson, wildly.

"By Jove! the Oklahomaite has gone crazy! It's no small thing to find a man tied up thus and held a prisoner, I'll admit, but—why, the two are shaking hands like mad."

"Saved, saved!" exclaimed the recent captive, as well as he could speak after having his jaws cramped by the gag.

"And who the dickens are you?"

John Williamson wheeled upon the questioner.

"Don't you know him?" shouted the man from Oklahoma. "Why, it is Lew Austin, the jockey—Lew Austin, alive!"

And then he fell to shaking the rescued man's hand again.

It was long before the reunited friends could speak coherently, and it took more time for the jockey to tell his story, but it was given at last. He had been a prisoner on the Dancing Jane ever since his disappearance. He had been waylaid by Deegan and Higgins, after being decoyed to the beach by Manchester on a plausible errand, and then, as soon as overpowered, he was taken in a boat to the steamer, Captain Teddy performing that

work, and all of the land-force returning to their usual haunts.

It had been the plan to take Lew well to the South—where, or with what ultimate object was not known to him; but, when a little way out, the machinery of the steamer broke down, and they had to return for repairs. All the while Lew had been kept close captive, but not subjected to any indignity, and, while his captivity was wearing and painful, he was none the worse for it. From talk he had overheard since their return to New York he knew that Manchester had planned it all, and that he had been thus summarily removed from the vicinity of the race-track because of the conversation he had overheard whereby he learned of Manchester's deep hatred of Williamson. The judge had taken desperate chances to remove him, and all had gone well until now. Finally, he was there to assure them that he had not been killed on the beach.

"But the body found there?" questioned a detective.

"I can only say it wasn't mine. I lost a part of my clothing in the struggle on the beach, and I did some shouting for help, but I am here to declare that I am not dead."

John Williamson caught his hand again.

"Alive, alive!" once more shouted the man from Oklahoma.

"Sound as a button."

"Lew, this will be glorious news for Lois!"

"Let us go to her. I need rest, and I know of no better place to get it than where she is. Come with me to her, John."

Williamson turned to the detectives.

"Gentlemen," he directed, "kindly oblige me by raking this gang into custody. We want them to fill niches in the city prison. That's all; let us go. The desperado game seems played to an end."

The passage of time had brought changes to the characters of our chronicle. Deegan, Higgins and Chase Manchester are serving time in Sing Sing. The judge would rather have died than go to prison, but he assuredly had no choice in the matter. He takes captivity hard, and broods all the time over his downfall. His sentence is for life.

Otis Manchester was free from any charge, and disappeared from the vicinity.

Verplanck Jones recovered his health, but not his spirits. Chance revealed the fact that Judge Manchester had poison like that which had so nearly taken the man's life, and this, together with a late realization that he had been a cat's-paw of the judge's through it all, humiliated Verplanck deeply. More, he was sorry he had married Mabel, but sorry too late. They still live together, but report says they quarrel bitterly and ceaselessly.

The body found on the beach was properly identified, finally, and re-buried accordingly.

Pontiac reappeared on the track under the joint care of John and Lew, and won the Maple Leaf Stakes in fine style. The old warrior of the turf not only had not broken down, but gave promise to win many a race in the future—which he did.

Dickey Spicer received a handsome cash present from the Oklahoma sport, who earnestly tried to redeem him from tramping, but, at last accounts, Dickey had not changed. He is still a rover, good natured, unclean, and devoted to his almanac.

John has not returned to Oklahoma as yet. He and Lew have been in the horse business together, and though they may some time go in company to the West, they are now stars of the Eastern turf. And, most agreeable of all, Lois Austin is now the wife of the man she believes to be king of all men, John Williamson!

THE END.

No. 876. Gold-Button Sport; or, The Miner Sharps of Sulphur Bar. By Albert W. Aiken. Now Ready.